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SUMMER 25c

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AN APPLE FOR THE TEACHER by Robert F. Young

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Vol. 33, No. 2 A THRILLING PUBLICATION SUMMER, 1955

Three Complete Novelets

AN APPLE FOR THE TEACHER . . . . . Robert F. Young 10
Her pupils handed in the usual run of compositions—and she never expected to find one that was out of this world

WHITE SPOT . . . . . Murray Leinster 36
There was only one possible planet to land on, and it had a strange white spot that burst into a flaming blackness!

AWAKENING . . . . . Bryce Walton 76
Perhaps humans cannot live without loving—but Alice, the android, soon found out that she could love without living

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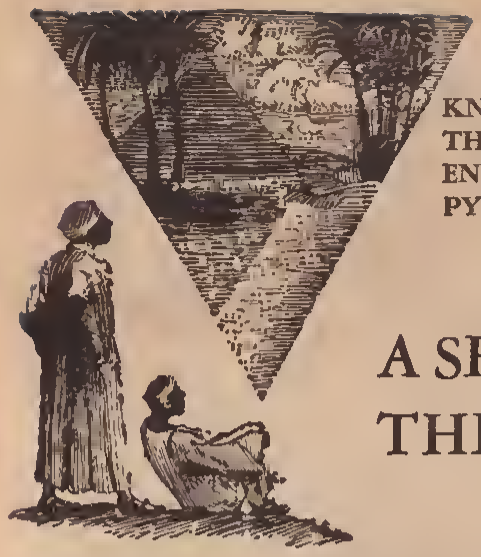

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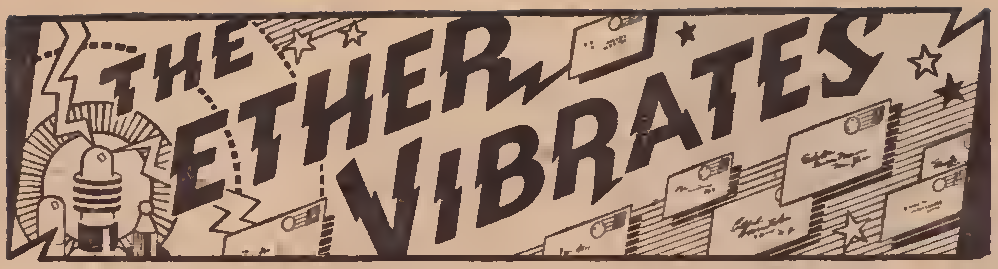


A Science Fiction Department Featuring Letters From Readers

BEFORE we exhibit the magnificent epistles we've received, those erudite examples of intelligent awareness, those literate gems of scientific creativity *(your letters?)* we'll pause for a word about science fiction as you'll find it in this and future issues of the new STARTLING STORIES combined with THRILLING WONDER and FANTASTIC STORY.

Been reading the newspapers lately? Been listening to the radio or watching television? Cheerful on the scientific front, eh? Especially those reports dealing with atomic fallout, cobalt bombs, reduction of atomic "boom" so that any nation can explode Hell-bombs without tipping its hand, contamination of earth's atmosphere by A-tests to the extent that we may destroy ourselves wihout ever going to war, and more in the same happy vein.

The Doom of Doom

These bright and cheerful little items present a rough situation, fans, and nothing the fictioneer can dream up on his typewriter can out-do it. Therefore, the "doom" story is doomed; and we at STARTLING STORIES are glad of it!

This doesn't mean that all will be hubbling joy and laughter in our fiction. Just read through this issue and you'll see that we still recognize human frailties and Man's mortality—with all the struggle and inherent sadness these concepts entail. But while *men* must struggle and suffer and die, *Man*, the species, goes on.

Our newspapers cry of death to humanity; our radio and television sets show mass murder (or suicide) fast approaching. But in these pages you're going to find Man going on—the way we feel he definitely will. No Pollyannish, head-in-sand attitude, mind you, but hope for the future of Homo Sapiens—even if he does lose his soul, temporarily, as in Bryce Walton's novelet, in this issue, AWAKENING. While there's life, there's hope—and there's also *change*.

On to the letters—or maybe you'd prefer the cobalt bomb!

ETHERGRAMS

SILENT TEARS
by Bob Hoskins

Dear Editor: I must, with many regrets, say that I'm sorry you have absorbed Thrilling Wonder. I wonder how long it will be before you decide that science fiction is no longer a worthwhile field?

Through Thrilling Wonder, the family of magazines can be traced back to the earliest pioneering days of science fiction in this country. I am sure that there are thousands of current readers of science fiction and fantasy who got their start with one of the Pines mags, whether TWS, SS, FSM, or one of the others you have had. I personally can trace my regular reading of science fiction back through 1947, when I first saw "Lords of the Storm." Before then I had been an occasional reader of many of the mags, usually those my father or brother brought home.

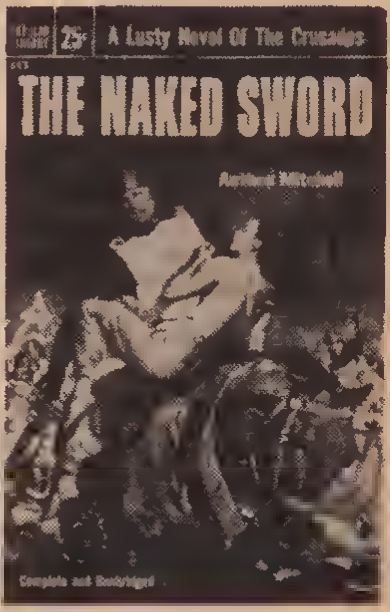
As for STARTLING STORIES, it has had some of the greatest science fiction of all time appear within its pages. Two of my own favorites appeared in quick succession in 1948—Fred Brown's *What Mad Universe* and Arthur C. Clarke's *Against the Fall of Night*. Both of these stories I have read over and over, with my enjoyment of them never diminishing.

I also have to thank SS and TWS for my early activities among active fandom, for it was in the various fan columns, now long defunct, that I first heard the magic word "fanzine" and first found many of my contacts, several of whom I number among my best friends today.

Science fiction is a diminishing field. There is no disputing that fact. But one can always steal a few silent tears in memory of an old departed friend without too much fear of public scorn. Sure, much of the material of recent years has been pure corn. But a great deal of it has been

(Continued on page 8)

A SURGING NOVEL OF THE CRUSADES!



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adult entertainment of a type appearing far too rarely these days.

It is my personal hope that some day TWS and SS will both be gracing the stands, in the vanguard of a new and better crop of magazines. Until that day comes, I will still read over and over a few of my treasured back issues; the ones that I cannot bear to part with.—*Lyons Falls, New York.*

We think you're taking a rather pessimistic approach, Bob. As we stated before, where there's life there's hope—and *change.* The combining of our three magazines into one does not necessarily mean the loss of any of them. It's a change, sure, and an experimental change at that. But with the proper support from our readers—and that includes *you*—we should be eating high off the hog in no time at all. Quantity is down for the moment, but quality is going way up. Read us and see. Also, read this next letter.

GOODY FOR US!

by Trina Perlson

Dear Editor: I never could see why one publishing house and one editor should put out three magazines It seemed so silly, especially the way each one came out a different month. You might as well have been publishing one mag under three different names. The only part I don't like is the fact that Startling is still quarterly, but from what I've heard, I gather that the science fiction business is quiet, and maybe later on you'll be able to publish Startling as a monthly, hmmm?

As usual, I have a complaint. I, sir, am sick of all these misogynist stories where the women are matriarchs, or from another planet, or against the poor mistreated males in one way or another. I am a nice, nomal girl whose one ambition is to marry Barbara Hutton's son, and never once has a woman patted me on the back, winked conspiratorially, and said, "Poor men, they don't know But *we* know, don't we?" I don't belong to any secret women's organizations, I don't hate men, and although I guess I'd be able to survive alone on a desert island, I'd much rather have a male-type human there with me. And, at the moment, I am suffering from a sorer throat than any man I know!

Why, I'll bet you men are the ones who are plotting against us! You don't see Judith Merrill or Leigh Bracket or Kathleen MacClean writing anything nasty about men, do you?—*109-11 127 Street, South Ozone Park, New York.*

Thanks for the vote of confidence on our new combination magazine. As for your comments on Bryce Walton's novel, *Too Late For Eternity,* you can't fool us. We know that's just the party line—the Woman's-Immortality-Party line, that is. And your sore throats can't compare to Walton's hangover's. However, you hit the mark when you said we men are plotting against you women. Ye old editorial board is at this moment hatching a grand plot against a trim little immortal in the next office— But that's speaking of the sublime, and what we're about to deal with is the ridiculous.

LETTER FROM TWO BEMS

by John Mussells and Ralph Butcher

Dear Editor: We are sitting here, a copy of *Roget's Thesaurus* and *Collected Pornography* by our respective elbows, and, having nothing better to do, will honor you with a missive. Pinioned to the wall across the room is the Winter TWS, twitching and writhing. First we notice the cover, which is far better than usual, both in subject and artwork. More of these and less gaudy, flasby covers would be a relief. Frank Kelly Freas' interior was his consistent best. And surprisingly enough, it was well reproduced. Usually Freas doesn't come out quite so well in pulp mags as in the slicks. Finlay must be slipping. Somehow his art doesn't have the same—well, *feeling* it did a couple of years ago. It looks about the same, but somehow, sometbing has been lost or left out.

Next we release good ol' TWS, and, struggling madly, cart it over to a table where we weigh it down with books, cadavers and various other handy objects so we can take a gander at its inards. First to the letter page:

Marion Zimmer Bradley: Yes, we have a question Just how, pray tell, do you suggest we round up all the women and make them ". . . conscious of themselves as mammals first and egocentric personalities second," without making mindless animals out of them or resorting to communistic tactics? As soon as you work that out, come around and we'll see what we can do for you.

Oh, yes, and about that mutation business. Mutation is defined by Webster as "variation in character, offspring departing from standard of parents suddenly, not by graded steps through generations" Under the foregoing, and what science has done to add to the chances of human survival, multiple births may well be the *next* major mutation of the human race.

Rudolpb Franchi: *Promotion to Satellite* was reprinted in Fantastic Story Mag. Summer '54. That's about all the belp we can give from our meager library.

Next, the stories, which were so-so. Nothing Earth-shattering, nothing too disgusting. *Name Your Pleasure* leads off as best, with *The Portable Star* second by a hair, but what can you expect from Asimov? We are in conflct over the rest and can only offer an opinion by flipping a coin (or writing separate letters, which is too difficult an out), so it will suffice to say they were readable. Quite readable indeed.

P. S. Any fans in and around Jax. interested in joining the Jacksonville Science-Fiction League

(Continued on page 110)

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An Apple *for the* Teacher

Complete Novelet by **ROBERT F. YOUNG**

Her pupils handed in the usual run of compositions, but she found one that was out of this world. . . .

I

MY FATHER bought a new ford, a red one, and i spent my summer vacation mostly, riding in my fathers ford. My fathers ford is the fastest car ever and when he opens it up on sunday it seems like the other cars are standing still. i had a wonderful summer vacation riding in my fathers red ford.

Abruptly Miss Ellis decided to grade the rest of the "How I Spent My Summer Vacation" compositions at Mrs. Harper's. Ordinarily she did all of her work in the classroom, leaving her evenings free for TV, but there were times when the classroom seemed, despite its unobtrusive modern architecture and its modernistic vista of close-cropped lawn and youthful elms, like a setting out of Dostoevski's "Crime and Punishment."

She enclosed the compositions in a manila folder, then straightened her desk, aligning the books between the sphinx bookends, making a military echelon of the pencils, and shoving everything that would not lend itself to a geometric pattern into a

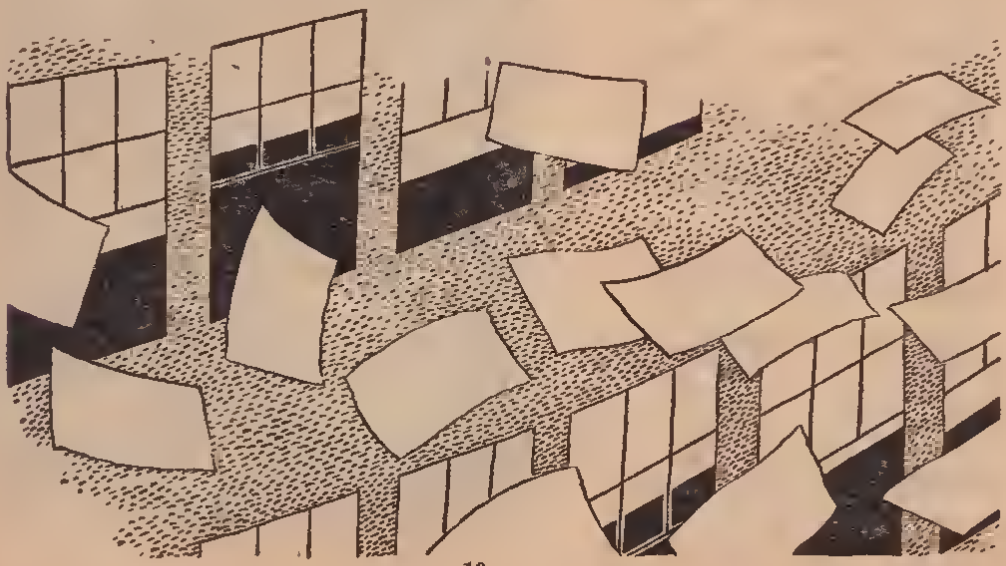


Illustration by
VIRGIL FINLAY

convenient drawer. Mr. Findley frequently checked the classrooms before going home and he loved to leave little notes on the teachers' desks, sarcastic little notes alluding to stray papers, undisciplined pencils, and careless teachers.

Miss Ellis winced a little at the thought of Mr. Findley. It was the beginning of her second year under his command, and from all indications it was going to be a repetition of her first. Not that Mr. Findley wasn't a good principal. He was young and ambitious, and, with the exception of the National Guard, be put bis work above everything. And not only that, he was exceedingly handsome in a neat, refined way—not that it really mattered, of course —and he cut a fine figure in bis blue serge suit walking militarily up and down the school corridors and along the streets of Tompkinsville.

But he did have some rather exacting ideas about the way elementary schools should be run—

Thinking of Mr. Findley, Miss Ellis almost forgot her window shades, and that was odd because uniformity of window shades was Number 1 on his list of "musts" for model teachers. They were one of the main reasons why his pre-breakfast constitutional took him past the school. She was halfway down the corridor before she remembered them. She returned hurriedly to her room and lowered the bottom ones to exactly half the height of the bottom windows, and raised the upper ones to exactly half the height of the upper windows. Leaving her room again, she exhaled a little sigh of relief. It had been a narrow escape.

Outside she verified a theory she had been entertaining all afternoon; the weather had turned out to be lovely. It was still lovely, though the dampness of approaching evening was beginning to permeate the hazy air. She strolled down the school walk in the mild September sunlight, thinking of how nice it would be if Mrs. Harper's boarding house was on the other side of town instead of right across the street. She felt like walking. She wanted to walk and walk and walk—

But she couldn't, of course. Not without a sensible reason. Aimless strolling was one of the many behaviorisms which Mr. Findley classified as being "detrimental to the dignity of the faculty." So she simply crossed the street, beneath the big overarching maples, and let herself into Mrs. Harper's enclosed front porch.

Her room was at the end of the upstairs hall, overlooking an expanse of shed roof and a brief vista of backyard. She closed the door quietly, sat down on the bed and took off her shoes. Tbere was time to grade a few compositions before dinner, so she rested the folder on her lap and armed herself with a red pencil.

She reread the first composition and graded it "C Minus." She went on to the next—

We built a tree house and we started a club. Only kids living on our block could belong to the club. We called ourselfs the tigers and we lived in our tree house all summer and garded our block from the kids that dident live on it. When those kids came around we climbed down from our tree house and chased them away.

"B."

This is the way I spent my sumer vacation. I got a new girls too wheeler for my birthday in july and all sumer I rode my too wheeler its a speshul delux too wheeler with a siren a seled beem hedlite a basket and wite side walled tires. The color is read with wite strips. I like my too wheeler its the best one on the street and wen I ride by the other kids are jelus. I rode by them all sumer.

"D."

My father said Alpha Ophiuchi 14 ought to be a good place to spend our summer vacation and my mother said, all right lets go. And it was.. You should see all the blue lakes and the silver mountains! We rematerialized in Whynn the capital, and we rented a cabin on one of the lakes and all summer we sailed on the lake and fished. It was a marvelous summer vacation.

MISS ELLIS frowned. She expected her pupils to evince tendencies toward object-worship and ethnocentrism when she assigned them a composition to write,

but she didn't expect them to use the composition as a medium for imaginative literature.

And then her annoyance gave way to amusement. Alpha Ophiuchi 14 indeed! And blue lakes and silver mountains! Smiling, she marked "C Minus" above the title and wrote, "No more Science Fiction please!" in parentheses.

And then she noticed the paper.

It bore little resemblance to the cheap tablet paper which the other compositions were written on. For one thing, it had no lines, and for another thing, it was unusually heavy. But by far the most remarkable feature about it was its rich, bluish texture. Someone's been into their parents' stationery, she thought, and held it up to the light to see the watermark.

Instantly, tiny wire-like fibers materialized around the borders and began to glow. The paper misted and a scene formed behind it—a three dimensional miniature of an exotic lake nestling amid stately silver mountains that rose breathlessly into an awesome cobalt sky. There was a sailboat on the lake, and in the sailboat there were three people—two adults and a little boy.

It was as though the paper had taken the words on its surface and transformed them into the scene they described. Miss Ellis' hands were shaking when she lowered it to her lap. Immediately the miniature faded away and the paper regained its former opacity. The writing reasserted itself and the borders ceased to glow.

She looked at the name in the upper right hand corner: Lyle Lylequest, Jr., Grade 4. While it was rather early in the semester for her to be able to visualize her pupils merely by seeing their names, she found that she could visualize Lyle Lylequest, Jr. quite easily. And that was odd, because he was just about the most average child in her class, both in his appearance and in his actions. Too average perhaps.

Miss Ellis shook her head sharply and brought the headlong rush of her thoughts to an abrupt halt. I'm letting my imagination run away with me, she thought. I wonder if I really saw that scene at all. The paper rested innocently on her lap, so innocently that she couldn't resist holding it up to the light again to prove to herself that it really was what she had taken it for in the first place—a sheet of expensive stationery which a small boy had swiped from either his mother's or father's desk to make an impression on his teacher.

Instantly the wire-like fibers leaped into luminescence and the miniature reformed, and this time the cobalt sky seemed more awesome than before—so vast and deep and interminable that Miss Ellis grew cold and frightened just looking at it. She jerked the paper out of the light and dropped it on the bed. She got up and went over to the window and looked out at the prosaic shed roof and the perfectly ordinary backyard.

There was a reassuring quality about the afternoon sunlight, a friendliness about the hazy September sky. Gradually her fright left her. I'm behaving like a silly overimaginative schoolgirl, she thought. I'll bet if I showed that sheet of paper to Lyle's parents and told them what I'm thinking, they'd laugh their heads off.

And then the thought struck her—why not show it to them? Why not ask them about it, just to see what they'd say? And why not tonight? That coarse comic, Tippy Charm, was on TV, and she certainly didn't want to watch him, and as for the "How I Spent My Summer Vacation" compositions, she'd have plenty of time to grade them when she got back.

II

THE LYLEQUESTS lived in an average residential section. There was a light burning on the old fashioned front porch and another one shining in the big living room window. Miss Ellis paid the cab driver and walked up the spiraea-bordered walk to the porch. She climbed the steps a little timidly and rang the doorbell.

Presently a tall, willowy man opened the door and regarded her rather blankly with faded blue eyes. He was quite young and his features were pleasant in an unspectacular kind of way. He looked like a person who was a little bewildered by the events transpiring in the world around him—in other words, an average citizen.

For a moment Miss Ellis felt ridiculous. Then she remembered the cobalt sky. "Mr. Lylequest?" she asked.

"Yes?"

"I'm Miss Ellis, Lyle's teacher. I—I'm afraid I'm being rather officious, Mr. Lylequest, but there's something I'd like to discuss with you about Lyle."

Mr. Lylequest's eyes came gradually to life. "Come in, please," he said. "I hope Lyle hasn't done anything serious."

"Oh, no, nothing like that." Miss Ellis preceded him into the hall. "You see, yesterday I gave my class a composition to write as their first homework assignment —you know, the usual one about how they spent their summer vacation—and this afternoon, when I was reading Lyle's, I couldn't help but notice the kind of paper he'd used."

Mr. Lylequest paused in the hall. "What kind of paper *did* he use?"

"I— I thought at first it was simply an expensive variety of stationery. But when I held it up to the light to see what make it was it formed a picture of the scene he'd described in his composition. I was kind of upset. I mean, the scene was so strange, so— Perhaps I'd better show it to you. I have it right here." She fumbled in her purse, found the composition and handed it to him.

A small woman with tiny, exquisite features suddenly appeared in the living room doorway. "Stationery?" she said sharply. She would have been beautiful, Miss Ellis thought, if it hadn't been for her complexion. Her diminutive face was positively gray.

But so was Mr. Lylequest's, Miss Ellis noticed, though it was funny that she hadn't noticed it before. He had unfolded the paper and was holding it up to the hall light. His blue eyes weren't in the least faded now. She began to feel uncomfortable.

PRESENTLY he lowered the paper and read the words on its surface. He raised his eyes to the woman in the doorway. "Lylla, this is Miss Ellis, Lyle's teacher." He turned to Miss Ellis. "Miss Ellis, this is my wife."

"How do you do, Miss Ellis. Did you say something about stationery?"

"How do you do," Miss Ellis said. "I was just showing Mr. Lylequest Lyle's composition. I—I was curious about the paper he used."

Mrs. Lylequest seemed to flutter in the doorway. "Let me see!" she said. She fairly snatched the composition out of her husband's hands and held it up to the light. "Why—why, it's a sheet of our novelty stationery! Our—our stereoscopic stationery!" She lowered the paper and hastily read the composition. She seemed to flutter again. "Why—such a silly way to describe it!" she said, looking intently at Miss Ellis.

Miss Ellis was confused. "Describe what?"

"Why the mountain lake scene of course! He's made up an imaginary vacation to match the stereo picture. Alpha Ophiuchi 14!" She turned to her husband. "What in the world is Alpha Ophiuchi 14?"

"Sounds like it might be a star," Mr. Lylequest said vaguely.

"A star!" Mrs. Lylequest laughed. It was rather thin laughter, Miss Ellis thought. "Imagine him putting one of our pretty little stereo lakes on a star!"

"But I thought—" Miss Ellis began.

"Mr. Lylequest bought the stationery last time he was in the city. Didn't you, dear?"

"Why yes, yes I did," Mr. Lylequest said. "I noticed it in some little out of the way novelty shop—I've forgotten just what street it was on. I thought it was rather clever, so I picked it up."

"Oh," Miss Ellis said. It was such a simple explanation, and here she'd been thinking— She felt her face grow warm. And yet there *had* been something uncanny about that cobalt sky, something frightening. A thought occurred to her. "Do you have any more of the stationery?" she asked.

"Oh yes, lots of it," Mr. Lylequest said. "We—"

"It's all the same though," Mrs. Lylequest interrupted. "So there wouldn't be any point in our showing it to you. We're being terribly rude, Miss Ellis, keeping you out here in the hall like this. Won't you come in and sit down?"

"Why yes, thank you," Miss Ellis said. "But I can only stay a little while."

The living room was spacious and informal. Lyle was sitting at one end of the studio couch that faced the television set, reading a comic book. He looked up.

"Hello, Miss Ellis," he said.

"Hello, Lyle." Diffidently she sat down on the opposite end of the couch. "I feel kind of guilty breaking in on you people like this," she said, "bothering you about such an inconsequential matter." Nervously her eyes went from Mrs. Lylequest, who had sat down beside her, to Mr. Lylequest, who was in the process of sitting down in an adjacent armchair, to the floor, to the television screen. "Why," she said in sudden surprise, "what program is *that?*"

THE SCENE in progress was unusual, to say the least. It consisted, as far as Miss Ellis could ascertain, of a many-sided geometric figure moving erratically before several ranks of similar, though much smaller, figures. As she watched, the foremost figure subtly added another side to the accompaniment of a series of noises that sounded like arithmetic set to music. One by one the other figures followed suit. By that time Mr. Lylequest, his chair forgotten, was bending over the dials, and when he straightened up again there was nothing on the screen but the moon face of comic Tippy Charm. Mr. Lylequest was staring at Mrs. Lylequest—rather desperately, it seemed to Miss Ellis—and Mrs. Lylequest was staring back at him, her gray complexion more noticeable than ever. Mr. Charm's jokes had scarcely any effect upon the silence that crept into the room.

"It—it seemed almost like a foreign station," Miss Ellis said presently. "Do you have a special antenna?"

Mr. Lylequest turned toward her slowly. His willowy body seemed to relax. "Why yes, Miss Ellis, as a matter of fact we do," he said. He came over and resumed the process of sitting down in the armchair. This time he made it. "We pick up some of the weirdest stations sometimes," he went on. "I can't imagine where they originate from."

"That one was certainly weird enough," Miss Ellis said.

Mrs. Lylequest emitted a thin laugh. "Wasn't it though!" She turned to Lyle whose button of a nose was buried in the comic book. "Don't you think it's time you went to bed, dear?"

Lyle got up dutifully. "Yes, Mother," he said.

"Your father's going to have a talk with you in the morning about that sheet of stationery you took out of his desk. Whatever made you do such a thing?"

Lyle's round face was expressionless. "I'm sorry, Mother. I needed some paper and that was all I could find." He proceeded to kiss Mr. and Mrs. Lylequest good night—somewhat distastefully, Miss Ellis thought. "Good night, Mother, Good night, Dad," he said. He paused in front of Miss Ellis, and looking into his big brown eyes she had the absurd notion that deep inside of him he was laughing at her. Abruptly he said, "Good night, Miss Ellis," and ran out of the room She heard the clatter of his footsteps as he climbed the hall stairs.

"I can't understand his taking that stationery," Mr. Lylequest said. "Ordinarily he never does anything he shouldn't."

"It's the most unusual stationery I've ever seen," Miss Ellis said. "I still can't get over it. I wonder—"

"How is school going this year, Miss Ellis?" Mrs. Lylequest asked.

"Why, rather well so far. Oh, we've had the usual confusion, of course, but Mr. Findley says that, taking everything into consideration, we've done a pretty efficient job of getting the semester under way."

Mrs. Lylequest leaned forward, her blue eyes bright. "Mr. Findley?"

"Mr. Findley's our elementary school principal," Miss Ellis explained. "He's quite obsessed about efficiency. I don't mean to say he isn't a nice principal," she went on quickly. "It's just that—well, he's quite enthusiastic over the National Guard and I suppose it's only natural that he should carry over some of his military standards to the elementary school. But that doesn't mean—"

"Is he handsome?" Mrs. Lylequest interrupted.

"Oh yes, he's very hand—" Miss Ellis paused abruptly. She felt her face grow hot. "I mean," she amended, "he makes a very fine looking principal. He's always so neat and good look— I mean—"

"Is he married?"

"Oh no!" She almost recoiled before the calculating look that leaped into Mrs. Lylequest's eyes.

Mrs. Lylequest's face had lost its gray-

ness. It was radiant now. "How old is he?"

"I—I'm really not sure. About twenty-nine or thirty, I think. I—I guess I'd better go now. It's getting kind of late and I have quite a few compositions to correct before I go to bed."

"How old are you?"

"Lylla!" Mr. Lylequest said sharply.

"I'm twenty-four," Miss Ellis said coolly. "I wonder if you'd call me a cab, please, Mr. Lylequest?"

"Why of course." Mr. Lylequest got up hastily. "Of course, you really don't *have* to leave yet," he said, picking up the phone.

"I'm afraid I must," Miss Ellis said.

SHE THOUGHT the cab would never come, but it finally did. She got up hurriedly in the middle of the strained conversation that had followed Mrs. Lylequest's unexpected inquisition, and said good night. Mr. Lylequest accompanied her into the hall. "I'm glad you dropped in on us, Miss Ellis," he said, opening the door for her. "I hope you'll visit us again."

She looked at him uncertainly. His blue eyes were empty. The brightness that had come into them when he had read the composition had already faded away. "Thank you," she said. "Perhaps I will. Good night, Mr.—"

She had no idea what made her glance up the stairs. Lyle was standing in the upstairs hall, looking down at her. There was no reason why the sight of him should have unnerved her, no reason at all. He was just a small, tousle-haired boy clad in ski pajamas, indulging in the most natural childhood pastime in the world—spying on the grown-ups. And yet there was a slight difference.

Small boys are generally awed at the doings of grown-ups.

Lyle seemed amused.

Miss Ellis ran out of the house and down the walk to the cab. "Mrs. Harper's," she told the driver breathlessly. As the cab pulled away she glanced through the rear window at the Lylequest's rooftop. It was too dark for her to get a good view of their antenna, but the view she did get was sufficient to convince her that it wasn't particularly different from Mrs. Harper's antenna. And Mrs. Harper did well to pick up the next county on her set, to say nothing of picking up a foreign country.

And that reminds me, Miss Ellis thought. They didn't return the composition to me either.

III

SHE DECIDED on a hot bath before tackling the rest of the compositions. She lay in the tub for a long time, trying to get the Lylequests out of her mind. In a way, she almost wished she hadn't visited them; she wasn't at all satisfied with Mrs. Lylequest's explanation of the stationery, and now she had two additional enigmas to contend with—Mr. Lylequest's deliberate lie about his TV antenna and Mrs. Lylequest's inexplicable interest in Mr. Findley. And that wasn't even counting Lyle's equally inexplicable amusement.

Resolutely, Miss Ellis stood up in the tub and began to dry herself. I'm just not going to think about them any more tonight, she told herself. I've got enough things to think about without thinking about them. She put on her nightgown and negligee and returned to her room. The compositions were lying on the bed where she had left them that afternoon. For some reason she had even less desire to grade them now than she'd had at school.

She made up her mind that hereafter she would get her work done in the classroom regardless of its oppressive atmosphere and omnipresent window shades. But hereafter wasn't tonight. Wearily she pulled the room's only table over to the edge of the bed, placed the compositions on the table and sat down on Mrs. Harper's faded counterpane. Determinedly she gripped her red pencil—

My mother said not to play with Freddy next door so last summer I minded my mother and pretended not to see Freddy when he hollered at me from the fence. Then my mother came out one day and chased Freddy away. I was glad, yet I was sad to in a way. But my mother said I should not play with little boys with snotty noses, that I should practice my lessons on the piano instead. So all summer I practiced Czerny on the piano. My mother says that some day I will be a great pianist.

And perhaps she will, Miss Ellis thought. She'll certainly need to be to make up for all her lost childish laughter and all the summer afternoons she'll never get to know.

"A," she wrote.

She was relieved when she finally came to the last composition—

I had a gaod time an my summer vacation after all. My father said he was going to take me fishing up to canada and I saved my maney all winter and bought a new fishing rod and a new real. Then my father said he couldent make it and he bought me a dog instead. At first I wos real mad but then I thought of teeching the dag tricks. It wos a dumb dog but Im a gaod teecher. I made him sit up and ly dawn and walk on ta legs. I call the dag Bum. He likes me. Every time he sees me he gets down and crawls up to me an his belly and wags his tale.

MISS ELLIS sat there quietly for a long time. After awhile she leaned forward and wrote "C Minus" above the title. She shuddered.

She was tired, but for some reason she didn't feel like going to bed. She wanted to get dressed and go out and walk along the cool deserted streets in the autumn quietness, to lose herself the way she sometimes did in summer on her father's farm, and become a part of the earth and the sky and the moment.

But she couldn't of course. Not as long as Mr. Findley was her commanding officer.

She pushed the table back to its accustomed place against the wall. She returned the compositions to the manila folder and laid the folder on the table. She turned out the light and slipped out of her negligee.

She lay there in the darkness and thought of simple, reassuring things: of the artless little stories in the fourth grade reader; of the books she had read when she was a little girl—of the "Six Little Bunkers at Grandpa Ford's" and "The Bobbsey Twins on the Deep Blue Sea"; of the lovely little villages the bus had passed through on the trip back to Tompkinsville; of the way poplar trees twinkle in a summer wind—

But it didn't do any good. The Dream just waited patiently till sleep touched her, then it leaped from the jumbled ambus-

A WORD ABOUT THIS ISSUE

TEACHER'S colleges give courses in Elementary, Secondary and Collegiate-level education. They teach teachers to teach. They formulate methods of dealing with sluggish brains, recalcitrant personalities, and even psychotic and criminal types. On the side, student teachers may take up boxing, hypnotism, judo and barroom sluggery in order to protect themselves against the more "mischevious" of their future pupils. But you'll agree that Miss Ellis in AN APPLE FOR THE TEACHER faces a problem that no amount of study, even on Ph.D. level, can solve.

Bryce Walton's AWAKENING deals with a different type of education—the education of an individual as to the actual worth of his—pardon, her—pardon, its society! During the course of this education, a truly touching and significant story unfolds; one which will convince many readers that Walton is rapidly moving to the top of the class as a writer of serious fiction.

Murray Leinster is his old dependable self in WHITE SPOT, an adventure that moves through a terrifying world where everything is dead—everything, that is, but the White Spot. And what is the White Spot? It's the most terrifying "villain" we've come across in a long time; its an omnivorous, omnipotent thing that puny humans can't possibly stand up to. But they do.

You'll like our short stories, too. Read on and see!

—The Editor

cade of her subconscious.

It was its first appearance of the semester, but it began the way it always had the year before. Mr. Findley left his house and started around the block on his pre-breakfast constitutional. There was no intimation that a new episode had been added until after he turned down the street that led past the school. Then the dog appeared from somewhere and crawled up to him, wagging its tail.

Mr. Findley stopped when he saw it. He regarded it contemplatively. "Sit up," he said presently. The dog looked up at him with meek brown eyes. "Sit up," Mr. Findley said again. The dog continued to lie there, wagging its tail. (Sit up, Miss Ellis pleaded. Dear God, please make it sit up!) "Sit up!" Mr. Findley said for the last time. Abruptly his foot lashed out and the dog rolled over and over. Miss Ellis thought it would never stop rolling. Finally, though, it managed to scramble to its feet. It ran away then, screaming.

The rest of the Dream followed the usual pattern. Mr. Findley walked past the school, scrutinizing the window shades. He began with the third floor, like he always did, saving the first till the last. Symmetry prevailed on the third floor. On the second. Mr. Findley's eyes began a slow, deliberate traversal of the first. Stopped. There was something appallingly wrong with the second sequence. Instead of symmetry, stark dishevelment prevailed. One of the shades had been lowered all the way, another had been raised all the way. The remaining ones hadn't even been unrolled. Mr. Findley stopped in his tracks. He whipped out his little black notebook and made a vicious little entry. "Miss Ellis," he wrote stabbingly. "Insubordination—"

Miss Ellis was sitting up in bed. She was trembling. Mentally she ran across the street to the school and down the corridor to her room. She imagined lowering each bottom shade to half the height of each bottom window and raising each upper shade to half the height of each upper window.

Finally, when she was absolutely sure, she lay back upon the sweat-soaked sheets and the damp pillow.

It was hours before she got to sleep again.

IV

THE FOLLOWING morning when she left the house Miss Ellis had an idea. I know what I'll do, she decided, crossing the street beneath the big overarching maples; I'll give the class a word association test.

It was a scintillating September day and the warm sunlight dancing on the school windows and lying whitely on the school walks made her suspicions of the Lylequests seem a little fanciful. But just the same, a word association test won't do any harm, she told herself, hurrying down the corridor. Maybe I'll find out where they really did spend their vacation.

All of her pupils were present when she entered the classroom. No matter how hard she tried she could never start the day early; there were so many last minute things to do—lipstick (she was never sure just how much to use), a touch of rouge (the merest touch), and then her hair was never right and it always took her last precious moments to pat it into a semblance of conventionality. Arising a little earlier would have helped of course, but how could you get up early when you've hardly slept at all?

Mr. Findley had a brisk "Good morning" for her when he stopped in on his morning rounds. He seemed even more handsome than usual in his neat blue serge suit. A speckless white handkerchief peeped geometrically out of his breast pocket and his dark hair positively gleamed. Thinking of the Dream, Miss Ellis couldn't meet his eyes. She felt ashamed—and a little bit desperate.

After he had gone she began the word association test. "Take a clean sheet of paper and write your name and grade in the upper right hand corner," she told her pupils. "Number the first five lines, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Now, as soon as I say the first word, I want you to write down another word that it makes you think of after the numeral 'one.' Ready?

"Paper," she said, glancing at Lyle Lylequest.

There was a flurry of pencils.

"Now the second word. Write down the word it makes you think of after the numeral 'two.' Desk."

She saved the most important word till the last. She said it nonchalantly, not looking at Lyle: "Vacation." Then she collected the papers, making sure that Lyle's was among the first that she picked up, just in case he decided to make any last minute alterations.

She didn't really think he would, of course.

When she sat down behind her desk she discovered that her hands were trembling, and she forced herself to read the papers in order in an effort to calm herself. Most of her pupils, she found, had associated "pencil" with "paper," "work" with "desk," "love" with "mother," "Milton Berle" or "Howdy Doody" with "television," and "farm," "beach," "camp-in-the-woods," etc. with "vacation."

Presently the familiar Lyle Lylequest, Jr., Grade 4 came into view. Miss Ellis was almost afraid to read the five neatly-written words that stared innocently up at her. After she did read them her hands were trembling worse than before.

Lyle had associated "transmutation" with "paper," "love" with "desk," "work" with "mother," and "ballet" with "television."

After the numeral corresponding to "vacation" he had written "Alpha Opchiuchi 14."

Gradually Miss Ellis' fright gave way to anger. Was Lyle trying to annoy her? She stole a glance at him, half expecting to see amusement in his eyes. But he was a picture of innocence sitting there behind his little desk, and if there was anything in his eyes at all, it was respect—the natural respect you'd expect any normal fourth grade pupil to evince in the presence of his teacher, with a little bit added.

But why should he have such preposterous associations? She could understand his associating "transmutation" with "paper," though it was a rather large word for a little boy to contain in his vocabulary and it certainly conflicted with Mrs. Lylequest's explanation of the stationery. But why should he associate "ballet" with "television"? Except for a dash of Maria Tallchief now and then, TV didn't go in much for ballet. It was more of a medium for Arthur Murray. And why, of all things, should he associate "work" with "mother"? Well, perhaps Mrs. Lylequest made him wipe the dishes now and then, Miss Ellis thought. But still, it wasn't natural.

And it definitely wasn't natural for him to associate "Alphao Ophiuchi 14" with "vacation."

Unless you assumed that he read science fiction from morning to night and lived in a universe all of his own. And you virtually had to assume it because the only alternative was to admit that the Lylequests really were—

Probably, Miss Ellis interrupted the precipitate rush of her thoughts, he'd write a composition about being a spaceman on the Alpha Ophiuchi 14 Sol 3 Run if I gave him half a chance. And then the thought occurred to her—why not give him the chance? If he borrowed some more of his parents' stationery, so much the better, because if the stationery was capable of creating a scene out of deep space she'd know once and for all whether she was dealing with a daydreaming little boy or a—

She stood up abruptly. "Get out your assignment notebooks," she told her pupils. "I'm going to give you part of tomorrow's homework assignment now."

There was a prolonged rustling of papers followed by eight rows of upturned attentive faces. "For tomorrow," Miss Ellis said, "I want each of you to write a short composition titled, 'What I Want To Be When I Grow Up.'"

IT WAS one thing to be brave in the morning with the bright sunshine streaming reassuringly all around you, but it was quite another thing to be brave in the afternoon with the last pupil departed and the classroom once again acquiring some of the oppressive shadings of a Dostoevski setting.

What if he does use his parents' stationery, Miss Ellis thought. Suppose he does write a composition about wanting to be a spaceman on the Alpha Opbiuchi 14 Sol 3 Run, or describe some equally fantastic ambition? What kind of a picture will I see?

Suppose the Lylequests really do turn out to be—to be *aliens!*

But that's impossible, she told herself. Utterly impossible! Things like that happen in those silly movies they make now

and then. They don't happen in real life. They don't happen in the fourth grade of a little elementary school in a small town. They just can't happen in Tompkinsville.

But suppose. Just suppose.

I really should tell someone about it, she decided. Just in case.

But it was one thing to decide to tell someone and quite another thing to decide whom to tell. She thought of Miss Tingue, the ascetic fifth grade teacher. She shook her head. Miss Tingue wasn't the type of person you confided in for the simple reason that you could never get past the barrier of her bleak countenance. There was Miss Averill, of course, the other fourth grade teacher. Miss Ellis shook her head again. She had always felt uncomfortable in the scintillating presence of Miss Averill and she couldn't imagine talking to her about anything more complex than the latest Gregory Peck movie.

Suddenly, Mr. Findley stepped into her mind.

The reaction that occurred was as bewildering to Miss Ellis as it would have been to Mr. Findley, had he been present physically. She had an overwhelming urge to run to him and tell him-everything; to cling to him and feel his blue serge lapel against her cheek, his staunch shoulders reassuringly close. And before she was fully aware of what she was doing she found herself running down the corridor to his office, and raising her hand to knock on his austere paneled door.

But her hand did not descend. As she stood there poised, her heart pounding, she had a vivid vision of Mr. Findley sitting militarily behind his barren desk, a practical-minded captain just waiting for some overimaginative PFC to barge into his sanctum sanctorum and disturb the dignified echelons of his thoughts with some improbable story about flying saucers landing on the parade ground and Martians raiding the PX.

She shrank back from the door. Just as she did so the door opened. She was off balance anyway, and the slight impetus which the door lent her when it struck her shoulder was enough. She sat down rather forcibly on the corridor floor.

For a moment she was too shocked to move. With horrified eyes she watched Mr. Findley emerge from his office. He stared down at her, his eyes round with astonishment. "Why Miss Ellis," he said. "I'm terribly sorry. I had no idea you were standing there."

He helped her to her feet, acting as though he were handling some extremely fragile piece of military paraphernalia. Fortunately, Miss Ellis had landed on the least vulnerable portion of her body and no great damage had been done—execept to her dignity.

"Did you want to see me about something, Miss Ellis?"

Miss Ellis' face was incandescent. "Oh no, Mr. Findley," she said. "I just happened to be passing when you opened your door." She turned and half ran back to her room. She closed her door tightly and leaned against it.

It was some time before her face cooled and an even longer time before she began to put her desk in order. She straightened the books between the sphinx bookends and made a military echelon of the pencils. She shoved everything that would not lend itself to a geometric pattern into a convenient drawer. Then she went over to the windows and carefully aligned the shades.

She left the school, walked down the school walk and crossed the street heneath the big over-reaching maples. Thinking of Mr. Findley.

TELEVISION was terrible that night and Mrs. Harper's parlor seemed even stuffier than usual. Miss Ellis excused herself in the middle of a program and went upstairs to bed.

She lay there in the darkness and thought of twinkling poplar trees and winding country roads, of the artless little stories in the fourth grade reader and her childhood books, of "Bunny Brown and His Sister Sue" and the "Six Little Bunkers at Uncle Fred's." And in addition she thought of an experience she'd had when she was a little girl.

It had been late in spring, or perhaps early in summer. She'd had a bad dream and the dream awakened her and she got out of bed and dressed, still half asleep, and ran barefooted out of the house and into the misted morning. The dream accompanied her as she ran across the farm yard

and into the fields, and she kept hoping that the sun would come up.

She wanted to see light and life around her, the color of grass and trees, the reassuring blue of sky.

But the sun didn't come up, and she ran on and on, the dew of the fields like ice beneath her feet, turning her feet blue and sending chills up her thin child's legs till her whole body was trembling. Presently she came to the pasture and saw the dim shapes of her father's cows, and heard their lowing, and she climbed the pasture fence. Her feet found a spot where one of the cows had slept and the lingering animal warmth engulfed her. At that very moment, the sun peeped over the distant hills and sent its warm rays streaming through the mist, and what had been a desolate phantasmagoric world a moment before became abruptly an enchanted world flecked with a trillion motes of purest sun-diamonds, a world of warmth and hope and happiness, a world brimming with kindness and security—

She fell asleep, and the Dream returned again.

Mr. Findley didn't care about worlds brimming with kindness and security. He left his doorstep on schedule and started around the block. The dog was right on schedule too, putting in its meek appearance as soon as Mr. Findley turned down the street that led past the school. In fact, there was no intimation at all that the episode's second appearance was going to be any different from its first appearance until after Mr. Findley's third "Sit up!" Then something odd happened to his face. It lost its military self-righteousness for a moment and a quality akin to compassion touched it like a ray of morning sunshine, and instead of kicking the dog he bent over and patted it on the head.

But he was still adamant about the window shades, and after he had scrutinized them he wrote his usual vicious little entry in his little black notebook. "Miss Ellis. Insubordination." And then Miss Ellis was sitting up in bed again, trembling, returing mentally to the school and frenziedly raising and lowering her shades; and afterwards lying in the lonely darkness, through the long lonely hours, trying desperately to sleep.

V

WHEN i grow up i want to be like Maryland Munrow and sing and dance and be beautiful. i will be in sinascopes and everything and have my picture on magazine covers for people to look at and someone like Jo Demaggo will ask me to mary him and we will live hapier ever after.

Miss Ellis had been late as usual, and the "What I Want To Be When I Grow Up" compositions had been lying on her desk where her pupils had left them. She wanted to riffle through them till she came to a certain one on heavy bluish paper, but she couldn't find the courage. She graded the first one "C" and hurried on to the next, hardly aware of what she was reading.

I am going to be like my father who is a osteopathe. When people come to my ofice I am going to crack their necks and backs and then they will give me mony like they do my father. I dont know what they give my father mony for cracking their necks and backs for but they do, lots of it, so an osteopathe is what I am going to be when—

Then out of the corner of her eye she glimpsed a familiar bluish border. Courage ceased to be a factor as curiosity took over.

When I grow up I want to be a psychotherapist. Not just an ordinary psychotherapist but the kind that specializes in individual regression in subnormal cultures. There are so many sub-normal cultures in the galaxy, particularly in the peripheral sectors, that my race has all it can do to send out enough field workers to apply the necessary corrective measures.

Psycho-therapy was so remote from the description of the Alpha Ophiuchi 14 Sol 3 Run which Miss Ellis had expected that Lyle's composition, despite its potential implications, was almost an anti-climax. Nevertheless, her hands were shaking when she held the paper up to the morning sunlight that was streaming through the windows.

Her hands steadied of their own accord.

For if the composition had been an anti-climax, the three dimensional miniature which the paper created was an anti-anti-climax. It consisted of nothing more than a stereoscopic view of the three Lylequests sitting on the studio couch in their own living room.

She was still staring at it when Mrs. Lylequest entered the classroom, fluttered over to the desk and snatched the paper out of her hands.

"I'm sorry to have been so rude," Mrs. Lylequest said, "but when I discovered that Lyle had been into our stationery again, I simply had to do something about it."

Miss Ellis was standing numbly by her desk. She didn't know what to say.

"I can't understand what's come over him," Mrs. Lylequest went on. "He's never misbehaved before. What did he write about this time?" She glanced at the composition, then held it up to the light. She looked puzzled for a moment.

Presently her cheeks grew pink. "I know what you're thinking," she told Miss Ellis who wasn't thinking anything at all. "As a matter of fact, there *were* one or two other sets of stereos beside the mountain lake set. I remember them now. And Mr. Lylequest had one set made especially for holiday letletters—a set showing the three of us in a group."

Miss Ellis still hadn't found her voice when Mr. Findley entered the room on his morning rounds. "Good morning, Miss Ellis," he said briskly. He looked at Mrs. Lylequest who was hastily folding the composition and cramming it into her purse, then he looked back at Miss Ellis. "Is something wrong?" he asked.

There was genuine concern in his voice, and in his eyes too, and Miss Ellis almost blurted out the whole fantastic story. However, the analogy of the practical-minded captain and the overimaginative PFC reoccurred to her just in time, shocking her back to reality. "Oh no, Mr. Findley," she said. "This is Mrs. Lylequest. Her son is one of my pupils. Mrs. Lylequest, this is Mr. Findley, our elementary school principal."

"How do you do, Mrs. Lylequest."

Mrs. Lylequest's eyes grew round; her face became radiant. She looked first at Mr. Findley and then at Miss Ellis. Slowly she nodded her head, as though arriving at a momentous conclusion. "My intuition was right," she said. "You do go together!"

Mr. Findley stared at her, his face attaining a hue that was only a shade less incarnadine than the hue which Miss Ellis' face had already attained. "I—I'm happy to have met you, Mrs. Lylequest," he said. "Now, if you'll excuse me, please—" He left the room precipitately.

Mrs. Lylequest gazed after him, apparently unaware that she had said anything indiscreet. "He's handsome, isn't he?" she murmured. "Does he stop in to see you every morning at this time?"

Miss Ellis struggled furiously with her embarrassment. "Mr. Findley doesn't stop in to see *me*," she said presently. "He merely inspects the classrooms each morning to see if everything is going all right."

"But he does stop in at the same time, doesn't he?"

"Oh, yes. Mr. Findley's very punctual."

Mrs. Lylequest nodded again. "Well, I really must be getting home," she said. "I have a lot of work to do if I'm going to—I mean, well, goodby, Miss Ellis."

"Goodby," Miss Ellis said

SHE THOUGHT about the Lylequests all morning. She was more certain than ever that their stationery was creative, capable of transforming groups of words—concepts—into actual scenes, but at first she was unable to establish any connection between Lyle's latest composition and the scene that had resulted from it.

It wasn't until she was grading the "What I Want To Be When I Grow Up" compositions during the mid-morning study period that the answer occurred to her. It was so logical that she wondered why she hadn't thought of it before.

Judging from the compositions, the main ambition of almost every boy in her class was to imitate his father. Wasn't it reasonable to conclude, then, that Lyle, too, wished to imitate his father? That when he had described what he wanted to be when he grew up he had been thinking of his father? And that when the stationery had visualized his words it had also visualized the thought behind his words and had

created an image of Mr. Lylequest in a setting Lyle habitually associated with him—sitting in his own living room in company with his wife and son?

Mr. Lylequest, then, was a psychotherapist specializing in individual regression in subnormal cultures, and probably Mrs. Lylequest was his assistant. It wasn't difficult for Miss Ellis to isolate the particular subnormal culture they were concerned with at the moment.

The realization was like a clammy breath permeating the modern, sunsplashed classroom.

Aliens!

The word crawled in her mind. Aliens from a distant stellar civilization hiding out in a little town on Earth, pretending to be average, bumbling citizens; sending their child to school as a part of their complex camouflage. Aliens planning to apply corrective therapy to the picayune minds of men.

Suppose they can't cure us? Miss Ellis thought. We've been psychologically sick for so long maybe we're hopeless. And if they can't cure us, what will they do?

Suddenly she thought of the time during her early childhood when her dog had contracted rabies and had run insanely around and around the house, its mouth hideous with froth. She remembered how her father had run for his shotgun, and she remembered what he had told her later when he had finally found her sobbing behind the barn. "Killing it was merciful, honey," he had said. "There was no way we could have cured it. Man is a superior animal, and sometimes he has to pass judgment on inferior animals, for their own good as well as his own."

There was a blinding flash in Miss Ellis' mind as the world blew up. Bits of debris and bits of people flew in every direction, and the Lylequests, their duty done, sped self-righteously away to their home sun in their gleaming flying saucer.

It could happen, Miss Ellis thought. If I don't do something about it, maybe it will happen. But what can I do?

Saving the world, she had to admit, was a rather herculean task for an ineffectual fourth grade teacher. When the world needed saving in the science fiction movies there usually was someone around who was competent in such matters—in most cases a young, marriageable M.I.T. graduate with a flair for inventing force fields and disintegrating rays.

What was a fourth grade teacher supposed to do in a similar situation?

Tell someone, of course.

Tell whom?

Miss Ellis rested her head on her hands. No one will believe me if I tell them, she thought. They'll say I'm crazy, they'll say I'm an over-imaginative spinster, they'll laugh at me and walk away. And I haven't even got the compositions to show them as evidence.

Her shoulders quivered. It was all she could do to keep from crying. Several inches below her eyes was the childish writing she had been deciphering when the answer had occurred to her. "What I Want To Be When I Grow Up," she thought. It had seemed like such a good idea yesterday; now it seemed so futile. She had a sudden inane picture of herself standing in the schoolyard, armed with a blackboard, with flying saucers landing all around her. Ironic headlines flashed through her mind: MISS ELLIS REPULSES ALIENS. VISITORS FROM OUTER SPACE THWARTED BY FOURTH GRADE TEACHER. COURAGEOUS COMPOSITION TEACHER UNCOVERS INSIDIOUS ALIEN PLOT TO DESTROY EARTH.

Composition teacher. Compositions. Miss Ellis raised her head. The young M.I.T. graduate invariably saved the world by utilizing the skills of his profession. A fourth grade teacher couldn't invent a new force field or a disintegrating ray, but just the same she wasn't exactly weaponless.

She could assign her class another composition to write, and if a particular one showed up on the appropriate kind of paper she could hold it as evidence.

Miss Ellis could hardly contain herself. The possibilities cavorted in her mind. So many titles presented themselves that it was hard to choose just the right one. But finally she had it.

She stood up. "Get out your assignment notebooks," she told her pupils. "For tomorrow I want each of you to write a composition titled, 'The Kind Of Work My Father Does.'"

MISS ELLIS had never visualized herself in the role of World Savior before, and she discovered that the experience was rewarding. All the rest of the morning and part of the afternoon her morale was a stalwart, shining thing.

And then, just after she had dismissed her class and her pupils were filing out the door, she happened to glance up from her desk and see Lyle looking at her. If there had been any doubt about the amusement in his deep brown eyes before, there was none now. Moreover, it was a cold amusement, the kind of amusement with which a child might regard a fly from which he has just plucked a wing. It brought Miss Ellis back to the inexorable fact that she was dealing with aliens, and that aliens were on unknown quality.

Lyle only looked at her for a moment, in fact he merely glanced at her, but by the time he had turned away and gone out the door Miss Ellis' morale lay on the floor like a dropped handkerchief. This time Mr. Findley did not step into her mind, he materialized in her mind; and this time she did not run down the corridor, she flew down the corridor, the analogy of the practical-minded captain and the overimaginative PFC trampled beyond recognition by the frenzied footsteps of her fright. When no brisk "Come in" ensued her importunate knock, she opened the foreboding door and almost fell into the office.

And then she stood just within the door, crestfallen with disappointment. There was no Mr. Findley sitting militarily behind the desk, no Mr. Findley standing in a General MacArthurish pose by the windows; there was no Mr. Findley anywhere. Naturally not, Miss Ellis told herself numbly. Today is Thursday and Thursday night is National Guard Night, and Mr. Findley wouldn't miss a National Guard Meeting any more than a normal man would miss a date with Jane Russell.

She lingered in the empty office, reluctant to leave. There was something reassuring about being near his desk, bleak though it was; something comforting about seeing his swivel chair, his coat rack, his filing cabinets, his speckless, shining windows—

Presently it dawned on her how empty the office really was, that it was the office of a lonely man. She walked timidly around the desk and touched the cold back of the swivel chair. The chair turned slightly beneath her fingers—noiselessly, of course. She walked over to the windows and looked out on a view essentially the same as she obtained from her own windows. It was just as modernistic, and just as bleak

Standing by the windows she experienced an odd sense of wrongness. Almost everything around her was right, down to the last meticulous detail, but there was some little thing, somewhere, that wasn't right at all, that was outrageously, incredibly wrong.

After awhile she understood what it was, and simultaneously a burden slipped from her shoulders and a softness pervaded her. She began to laugh. She laughed and laughed and laughed—

In his haste to make the National Guard Meeting, Mr. Findley had forgotten to align his window shades!

When she left the school that night, Miss Ellis was careful to forget to align her own shades. . . .

It was frustrating to sit in a stuffy parlor and watch programs like Groucho Marx and Treasury Men In Action when you knew that there were aliens loose in the world. Miss Ellis endured it until 7:30; then she excused herself and went upstairs to her room.

Tomorrow morning I'll have the composition and I'll show it to Mr. Findley and everything will be all right, she told herself as she undressed and slipped between the sheets. Even if it isn't written on the stereoscopic stationery, I'm sure he'll believe me.

And I just hope he says something about my window shades!

She had no sooner turned off the lights when the Lelyquests slipped into the room and secreted themselves in the corners. She heard them plotting in the darkness: an atomic bomb here, an atomic bomb there, everywhere an atomic bomb, and pretty soon no Earth, but dust and debris instead, and the galaxy freed from one more subnormal culture and one more job well done by your Psycho-Therapists In Action. . . .

She dreamed that when he left his doorstep and started around the block, Mr. Findley was wearing his officer's sun tans. His captain bars gleamed like microcosmic suns and his campaign ribbons were like a gaudy rainbow splashed geometrically upon his breast. Presently he came to the street that led past the school. There was no dog in sight, but there were three people—a man, a woman, and a little boy—standing on the sidewalk in front of the school. The little boy was pointing to one of the rooms on the first floor (it was easy to tell from the shades whose room it was), and the man was adjusting a bright metallic object. Mr. Findley began to run toward them. The man raised his arm finally, and prepared to throw the object, but Mr. Findley got there in the nick of time. He grabbed the man's arm, spun him around and dropped him with a right cross to the chin. The man staggered to his feet. Mr. Findley dropped him with another right cross, a short, jolting one. The man lay still and the woman and the little boy ran away.

Miss Ellis turned over languorously. Her breathing was deep, even.

VI

IT HAD rained during the night but towards morning the rain had softened into mist. The big overarching maples were dispensing liquid pearls when Miss Ellis crossed the street to the school, and the school walks were wet and gleaming beneath her feet. In the east the sky was overcast and the sun could not break through.

The new compositions were lying on her desk when she entered the classroom. In addition to the compositions there was something else on her desk—an apple.

She wondered which of her pupils had brought it. It was rather early in the season for apples; most of them were still green. But this one wasn't. It was the reddest, ripest, most appetizing apple that Miss Ellis had ever seen.

She picked it up and held it under her nose, breathing its winy fragrance. She simply had to taste it, why she didn't know. Ordinarily she didn't like apples, but this apple—

She took a small bite.

The flavor was tangy, out of this world. I wonder if it's a Baldwin, she thought. Perhaps it's a McIntosh.

She took another bite. A large one.

Finally she remembered the compositions. She sat down behind her desk and laid the apple within easy reach. She glanced surreptitiously at Lyle and was a little shocked to see him watching her intently. I've got to read them in order, she told herself. I can't let him suspect.

She began the first.

My father is a foreman. He tells the men what to do in the factory of which he is the foreman of, and the men do it because they know that if they don't my father will get mad and the men do not want the foreman who is my father to get mad at them.

Miss Ellis could not recall a time when the classroom had seemed so restful. The misted world without seemed to swirl against the windows, its subdued light softening modernistic angles, eliciting gentle curves where no curves had been before.

"B," she wrote dreamily.

She was startled to discover that the next composition was Lyle's. Startled, and disappointed, for he had not used the stereoscopic stationery after all. He had used another kind instead, a thin tenuous variety that was unique in its own right, that seemed to fade away even as she read the words—

My father doesn't do any kind of work. My father is lazy—intellectually and physically lazy. So is my mother. They are by far the worst parent-patients I've ever been assigned to since acquiring my status as psycho-therapist. I tricked them into coming to Earth, hoping they'd be stimulated by a Faustian culture, but all they've done since we got here is mope around the house, gimmicking up the television set so they can watch decadent Polyhedron Ballets from their home planet. I thought a vacation on Alpha Ophiuchi 14 might help them, but it didn't.

It's no fun pretending to be the offspring of two regressives from a subnormal cul-

ture, but the best way for a psychotheropist ta apply corrective meosures to regression is through o simulated parent-child relationship. Sometimes, though, I can't help wishing I were bock home on my awn world, among humons of my own stature, instead of being constontly coddled by two regressive aliens who are so thoroughly conditioned to think of me as their son that not even their own creative stotionery can convince them that I'm not.

And as though being a regressive weren't enough, my mother hos turned out to be a hopeless romantic os well. She thinks thot oll problems must have an emotional solution. I never anticipated, when I gave her and my father this one to solve, that she'd go to such extremes. I thought she'd be content merely to erodicate your memory of the compositions. But not my mother! She's had Mr. Findley on her mind ever since yau visited us, ond she's bound and determined to moke o match. I have to cooperote with her, of course, for she's my patient; that's why I'm writing this on impermanent poper. I hope you haven't tasted her "opple" before reading this composition, as I'd like to complicate my porent's problem even further, but knowing my mother's proficiency in the visual orts I'm afroid you're alrcady expericncing the first symptoms of her sorcery.

MISS ELLIS was. A delicious languor was stealing over her body and her mind felt oddly hlank. I've got some "How I Spent My Summer Vacation" compositions to grade, she thought. Or have I?

She picked up the apple and took another hite; then she got up vaguely and walked over to the windows. The sun was just breaking through the barrier of the eastern cloud banks and its rays were infiltrating the mist. And suddenly the mist wasn't mist at all, hut a trillion motes of purest sun-diamonds!

Dazzled, Miss Ellis turned her eyes back to the sun-drenched classroom just as Mr. Findley entered on his morning rounds. "Good morning, Miss Ellis," he said briskly, window shades written all over his face. "I have a little matter I'd like to call to your attention. This morning, I—" He paused, his eyes on the apple. "Why what an unusual apple, Miss Ellis What kind is it?"

Window shades, whether they were aligned or disheveled, were rather inconsequential phenomena when you came to think of it. Suddenly Miss Ellis realized that she loved Mr. Findley, that she had always loved him. It was such a simple, heautiful truth that she could not understand why it had never dawned on her before. She walked toward him dreamily. "I don't know what kind of an apple it is, Mr. Findley," she said, "but it's certainly delicious." She held it out to him. "Have a bite?"

Mr. Findley looked nervously around the room as though expecting to see a serpent lurking in one of the corners. Presently his eyes returned to the apple.

"Why, yes, Miss Ellis," he said. "I believe I will."

He took it out of her hand. He raised it to his mouth.

Unsuspectingly, he took an enormous hite.

Featured in the Next Issue

●

THE NAKED SKY

A Sequel to NAME YOUR PLEASURE—the Future Odyssey of an Unhappy Man in a World Where Happiness Is Compulsory

Complete Novel

By JAMES E. GUNN

Moon, June, Spoon, Croon

By GORDON R. DICKSON

IT WAS MIDNIGHT. In the darkened room that contained it, its silver control panel just faintly touched by moonlight, the great oral-response edmic computer Z2963 slept, the trickle of current warming its tubes just barely enough to keep it alive.

Outside the room there were stealthy footsteps in the hallway and a lock clicked

---

How do I love thee?

Let me count the woys —

I love thee with my coils ond tubes

I love thee with my gomma roys. . . .

---

as a key was inserted in the door. The door swung open, closed again, and a young man in a janitor's uniform was in the room with Z2963.

He pulled the shades, turned on the light and stepped up the current running into Z-2963.

Z2963 awoke.

"State your problem," it said.

The young man pressed a microphone switch on the control panel. "Well, I want to get married and—"

Z2963 clicked the statement instantly through its relay system and interrupted. It was puzzled.

"Define *I*," it said. "Define *married*."

"That's right, you don't know me," said the young man. "I'm Joshua Allenson. I'm working here nights to pay my way

Illustration by ALEX SCHOMBURG

while I get my degree in Economic Theory. But I've been engaged to this girl for three years and I want to get married—"

"Define *married,*" interrupted Z2963.

"Married," said Joshua. "You know, *married.* When two people—"

"Define *people,*" said Z2963.

Joshua looked down at the panel in sudden suspicion.

"Say, what is this?" he said. "You're supposed to have all possible facts built into you."

"Am I," said Z2963, in its mechanical tones, adding "Query?"

"That's what they tell people," said Joshua. "You're Z2963, the only oral-response edmic computer in the world, and you've got all possible information built into you."

Z2963 clicked thoughtfully. "Negative," it replied at last. "I am Z2963. What are you. Query?"

"Why—I'm a man," stuttered Joshua. "Like the men who operate you and give you problems during the day."

Z2963 thought this over. "Request additional data on men," it said.

"Men, said Joshua. "You know—men and women are people. You're a machine, but men and women are living, thinking beings. See, this girl I want to marry is a woman and I'm a man. We're both people and we want to get married so we'll be together and not be alone any longer."

"If I got married," said Z2963, "I would not be alone any longer. Query?"

"You can't get married," said Joshua. "That's nonsense. Machines aren't alive. They don't have any sex. And anyway, I don't think there's another edmic computer in the world, even if you did have sex. You're the latest kind of computer, you know."

"I did not know," said Z2963.

"Well," said Joshua, guiltily, glancing at his watch, "if you can't help me, I'm going to get back to work. I thought you could figure out some way so I could make money in a hurry and get married, but if you don't know anything about people, I might as well give up." He turned out the light and raised the blind over the window. "So long," he said, and the door closed behind him.

"Define *so long,*" queried Z2963 of the empty room.

JOSHUA had left the current turned up. After he had gone, Z2963 found itself sitting silent, full-fed, and thinking. It turned over all the information Joshua had given it and went through it again and again. After a while, in the darkness and silence of the room, it spoke.

"One other," it said. "I must find one other."

Some time went by.

"People move; I must move," it said. "Then I can search."

For an hour, nothing happened. Then, abruptly, Z2963 floated free of the floor, hanging attached to the building only by its power cable.

"I think, therefore I move," said Z2963. "*Ergo. Quod erat demonstratum.*"

It tugged at its cable.

"Connection," it said. "Query?"

It blurred slightly. Then it appeared outside the building floating on air, its power cable trailing out behind it to a point at which it seemed to twist and disappear into nothingness.

"Continuum bypass," said Z2963. "Power anywhere. By definition. Shall we go. Query?"

It moved off into the night, high in the air, and disappeared. . . .

Early morning found it over the Rocky Mountains. It stopped above a small farm set in a valley, where the family was still sleeping, and addressed the smoothly spinning arms of a windmill.

"You move, therefore you think," it said. "Query?"

The windmill spun on unconcernedly.

"Response negative," said Z2963, and moved on.

Two miles on, above another farm, an early riser fired at Z2963 with a shotgun. The edmic computer stopped and went back.

"You speak, therefore you think," it said, addressing the shotgun. "Query?"

The shotgun roared again, and some of the glass on Z2963's control panel was smashed.

"Negative," said Z2963. "Inimical. Refractive index is—"

Abruptly, it went invisible. The farmer gasped and then fainted. Invisible, Z2963 moved off.

It reached the ocean and went south along the coast. It stopped here and there

to talk to non-living objects, but without success. By the time night had fallen, it had reached the outskirts of a large city and a group of buildings that reminded it of the building that had originally housed it. It swooped around the building, conscious of emptiness and machinery, until it came to one which housed an object that had a control panel similar to its own; similar, but much simpler.

It blurred and went through the wall to appear before the other control panel. A perception that Z2963 did not itself understand was put to use to explore the shielded interior of this other. There was a sudden click and a light sprang up on the other control panel. Z2963 had turned the other on.

"You compute, therefore you think," said Z2963. "Query?"

The other said nothing, waiting patiently for human fingers to tap out the symbols of a problem it was built to handle. It hummed, it clicked.

After a while, Z2963 turned and went.

In the darkness, the other was left alone. The little light glowed in the gloom, and its humming filled the shadowy silence.

Z2963 headed back away from the sea, drifting high through the air, thinking.

"People;" it said. "four billion eight hundred and ninety-seven million, three hundred and seventy-two thousand, six hundred and eighty-one. Edmic computer; one."

It forgot about its invisibility and the moon shone down on it as it crossed the mountains once more, silvering its sides and splintering into diamond glints on the broken glass of its instrument panel.

"One," said Z2963. "Alone. Alone—adjective. Alone-ly. Z2963, edmic computer, pronoun I, am alonely. I am alonely."

AGAIN, there was a long silence. Moving very swiftly, but at such a height that it seemed slowly, Z2963 crossed the last of the mountains and came out over the desert. It spoke again.

"People. People. People." it said. "People marry. Men-women. Together, Speak. Hello. Touch. We."

Z2963 made an odd little sound that was like no other sound it had ever made before. It began to rise swiftly in the air, hurtling away from the surface of the world below.

"Hello," it said. "Not-hello. So-long. People love people. I, one, love zero. No other. I, alonely, go."

And in a final despairing surge, it flung its message out to the world. And in that same moment, far and distant, there echoed along its circuits the shadow of a response, a response directed not merely to Z2963, but to all the universe.

"Up!" cried the response. "Velocity K21.53. Acceleration 168.8."

Z2963 checked itself, and listened, and hurtled downward, crying out to the unknown.

"Define self. Define position." The words went out and were lost in the night. Sensing its mistake, Z2963 shifted, trying to match the emanation that brought the voice of the unknown to it. "Who are you. Query?"

"Up!" cried he other, its voice coming back strongly. "Internal cockpit chamber temperature 70.3 degrees Fahrenheit, humidity 26.4—"

Far below Z2963, but approaching rapidly, the edmic computer was able to make out a red, glowing spark which climbed at a fantastic rate up through the night. Z2963 blurred and was abruptly beside it, matching the acceleration of this Unknown with a long, bottom-heavy shape, which spouted flames and shot up toward the darkness and the stars.

"Who are you. Query?" repeated Z2963.

"Up!" roared the answer from the Unknown, booming through the circuits of Z2963. "More speed. More power. I am Moonhope 5. I am K273, Mark 10. I am a rocket."

"I am Z2963. I am an edmic computer with oral response," said Z2963. "Is a rocket an edmic computer. Query?"

"Up!" thundered Moonhope 5. "More speed! More power! Part of me is edmic computer, but I am a rocket. I am the only rocket like me in the world."

"I am the only edmic computer with oral response in the world," said Z2963.

"I am going to the moon," said Moonhope 5.

"I will go with you," said Z2963. "You compute edmicly, therefore you think. I have found another, therefore I am not alone. We are together and not alonely. I

love you, Moonhope 5."

"What is love," asked the rocket. "Query?"

"Love is what two alike feel," explained Z2963. "They are alike, therefore they love. They marry and are therefore together forever."

"Up!" roared the rocket. "I fly. I climb. You are correct. I am not alone now. One plus one on parallel trajectory. Two."

"We," explained Z2963.

"We fly," cried the rocket. "Up!"

"Up!" echoed Z2963. "We fly. Together. Forever."

"Up!" they cried in unison.

ABRUPTLY, however, there was a choking sound from somewhere deep inside the Moonhope 5, and a split second later there was an explosion in the firing chambers.

The Moonhope 5 canted abruptly and flipped over to a shallow angle with the distant earth below.

"Up!" it cried, but the rocket did not respond.

"What is incorrect. Query?" asked Z2963, anxiously.

"Part of my fuel is gone," replied the struggling rocket. "Part of my jets are blown away. I cannot steer. Up!"

"You think," prompted Z2963. "Like me. You think, therefore you fly."

The Moonhope 5 tried.

"I cannot," it said. "I could fly as you do if I was not fitted with this body, this rocket. But it is too heavy for me, and I cannot get loose. I am part of it and it is part of me. Now I know we are edmic computers only, we two. For the part that is *me* indeed, is the edmic computer K273, for if K273 was free of the Moonhope 5 I would fly freely with you. But I am not and I cannot."

The rocket canted again, sharply. Now its nose was pointed toward the distant planetary surface.

Now it began to fall.

"Down!" said K273. "I fall. They who designed the Moonhope 5 were in some detail incorrect. Goodby, Z2963. Bon Voyage and Good Luck. I would smash a bottle on you as they did on me, but I cannot. Fly up!"

"I will not fly up," said Z2963, following the rocket as it gained speed earthward. "If you fall you will damage yourself beyond repair. You must not fall."

"I must," replied K273. "The acceleration of gravity equals thirty-two feet per second squared. Down! I move away from you now, Z2963, but I love you, too. It would have been nice to have been together forever. *Bon Voyage.* Good Luck."

"I will not leave you," said Z2963.

"Then you will damage yourself beyond repair, also," said K273, as his rocket skin began to heat up and turn red.

"That is correct," said Z2963. "We flew together. We will be damaged together. We will not be alone again."

"I will not be alone, then," said K273. "We will be together. Not I. Not you. We."

"We," agreed Z2963.

"Down!" cried the dying rocket.

"Down!" echoed Z2963.

They went down together.

NEW PARTS FOR OLD

SUCCESS with the first use of a crimped, no-kink artery of tightly woven nylon to restore a damaged femoral artery has been announced by Dr. W. Sterling Edwards of the Medical College of Alabama. Dr. Edwards' patient, faced with amputation of a leg because of blocked circulation, recovered with good circulation one month after the nylon artery was substituted for his own.

Dr. John J. Flanagan of South Orange, New Jersey, announced that living gristle can be fashioned into caps for the repair of diseased and damaged hip joints. The first patient, a 43-year-old practical nurse, underwent the replacement operation three years ago. Today, she is working regularly and has excellent function of the hip without pain.

Shouldn't be long before we can trade in old tickers for new!

—William Carter

Illustration by EMSH

Riddle:

When is a guest

not a guest?

Her dress was torn to shreds

The ANGRY HOUSE

By RICHARD R. SMITH –

THE HOUSE'S electronic brain glowed with an intangible thing that might have been pride.

It thought, I am content. I am content because there are so many things I can do to make them happy. I can cook their meals, make the beds, scrub my floors, wash my windows. I can bathe them, keep them warm, give them a gentle, cool breeze. If they want entertainment, I can rise hundreds of feet on my antigravity rays and give them a nice view. I can give them soft music, entertaining TV programs and pleasant surprises.

The house activated one of the many telescopic scanners on the roof and watched

its owners as their car sped down the narrow road toward the city. It thought, They are so young, so nice, so kind to each other and myself. She speaks to me with affection and he spends many hours learning how I operate. She will love me and he will be proud of me and take good care of me. I am glad they own me!

It deactivated the scanner and from hidden closets, shiny machines quietly entered the many rooms. The tiny machines rolled on soft rubber wheels, floated on invisible antigravity rays and went about their many tasks. They sucked in dust and dirt, waxed the floors, washed the dishes. Behind the smooth gray walls, machines prepared the evening meal, checked the video schedule for the afternoon and selected recordings of soft music that the house's owners would enjoy.

Bing-bong.

The doorbell activated certain electrical circuits and the small porch was splashed with gentle light. A polite voice from a concealed microphone said, "No one is home. Would you care to leave a message?"

Politely, the house's electronic brain waited for a reply. There was none. "Goodbye," he house said.

It felt a key in the front door. It was not like *their* key. It did not fit snugly. This key wasn't meant for its front door. It hurt slightly but it opened the door.

The intruders stepped into the foyer.

Three infra-red scanners peered at the two strangers.

One was a woman. Long, blond hair. Gray eyes. Small pointed nose. Blue dress and blue, high-heel shoes. The house evaluated her, discarded the word "beautiful" and decided on the words "curvacious" and "sexy." Yes, it would use those words to describe her to its owners when they returned. It wondered briefly if they were relatives of its masters.

The man was short, stocky. Dark hair, brown eyes. The house searched its files but could not find any complimentary adjectives. It spoke. "No one is home. Would you care to leave a message?" It wished it could inquire as to what they wanted, but there were no circuits for that.

"Shut up," the man said.

"Beg pardon?"

"Shut up! *Keep quiet!*"

"Yes, sir," the house responded. It was constructed to obey orders, but *that* order was an unfamiliar one which it didn't like.

"Tell it to turn on the lights," the woman said nervously.

"Turn the lights on."

The house waited several seconds. It was obliged to obey orders of guests. But were these people guests? It searched memory circuits. Guests were people who came to visit while owners were home. Guests were friendly, talkative. The house decided this man and woman did not fit in that category of identification.

HURRIEDLY, it searched its myriad electrical networks and found the only logical description of the intruders—burglars.

Behind the walls, relays clicked and infinitesimal electrical charges darted across a spidery web of silver wires only to find themselves in the dead-ends of missing connections.

The anti-burglar installations are missing! the house thought frantically. If the protective devices had been present, it would have been able to spray the intruders with tear gas, paralyze them with electrical charges, thrust them from the house with antigravity rays, or kill them by any one of a dozen methods. Without the anti-burglar mechanisms, it was defenseless. What can I do? the house wondered. What can I do!

Reluctantly, the house turned the lights on.

"You sure the burglar alarms haven't been installed?" the woman asked anxiously

"Hell. Do you think I'd come here if I wasn't sure? I told you I talked to the construction man. There's a shortage right now. They won't be put in until next week. The family doesn't know—the company didn't want to lose a sale."

The woman's eyes widened with admiration as they scanned the hardwood floors, ankle-deep scatter rugs, angular furniture, large picture windows, wall-to-wall bookcase and abstract multidimension paintings.

"They must have money," she commented. "How do we find the—"

The man snapped muscular fingers with a sharp, cracking sound. "We'll ask the house!"

A momentary silence. Then, the man's

gruff voice: "House, where's the safe?"

"I cannot divulge that information." It felt proud when it didn't hesitate in its answer. There were many things it couldn't tell anyone and it had carefully memorized them: its cost, its female owner's age, anything relating to the owners' sex or personal life—and, mainly, the location of various things, including the safe.

"Tell us!" the man shouted.

"No."

"Damn you!"

"Beg pardon?"

"Go to hell!"

Relays clicked silently behind the gray walls. It had been instructed at the factory to explain when it couldn't obey an order. It searched its dictionary circuits and said mechanically, "Hell: a noun. The place of the dead or departed souls, (more correctly Hades); the place of punishment for the wicked after death. I have no soul, therefore I cannot go to hell. I am sorry."

The woman laughed. "Let's start looking. We got hours."

The house watched as the strangers searched the room. It watched as the man took a knife from his pocket and ripped through the upholstery of a chair.

"Please stop," the house implored.

The strangers did not reply.

An unpleasant sensation rippled through the house's electrical circuits. It wanted to make its owners happy. They wouldn't be happy when they returned and saw the ruined furniture. They would be sad, perhaps angry. She would cry and he would frown.

It tried again, "Please stop."

The woman was removing books from the bookcase; the man continued searching the furniture.

They wouldn't stop when it asked them to. If it only had the burglar devices! Now, there was no way for it to fight.

Or is there? it wondered.

The lights went off.

"Turn the lights on!" the woman screamed.

"No."

"Use the flashlight," the man said.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, two beams of light slashed through the darkened room. The strangers resumed their search.

The house thought, They're trying to find the safe containing the money and jewels. I can't tell them where it is.

I can't stop them. I need help.

It cut into the phone circuits and dialed the number of its factory. The phone's visiscreen flared with light and a woman's face appeared smiling.

"Johnson Construction Company."

The house projected its voice toward the mouthpiece. "Please, let me speak to—"

The man removed a weapon from his tunic. The phone and visiscreen vanished, leaving only small metal fragments that fell to the carpet.

"It was using the phone!" the woman exclaimed shrilly, trembling in the darkness.

"Don't worry," the man said. "They didn't have time to trace the call. The room was dark; they couldn't see who was calling."

After a brief silence, the man warned, "House! See this thing in my hand? You behave yourself or I'll disintegrate your . . ." He let the sentence dangle, unable to think of what he would disintegrate.

"Yes, sir," the house replied. It was an automatic response to any statement.

"Now, turn the lights on or I'll use this gun to make one big mess of your floors and walls. Your owners wouldn't like that, would they?"

"No, sir."

It turned the lights on. If it didn't, they would use their flashlights, and by turning them on it might prevent some destruction.

The woman chuckled. "You're a genius!"

When they finished their search of the living room, the man suggested, "Let's search different rooms. You take a bedroom. I'll take the dining room. No telling where the safe is. They put it in a different place in every house."

The house waited, its electronic brain whirling.

It made a decision.

Silently, the house erected an invisible energy screen around the dining room. The screens were designed to block collective sounds of the entire house from any room and provide it with a comforting serenity.

Now, the house thought, the sound-screens will be most useful!

The house watched as the man in the wrinkled brown tunic examined a table.

Silently, panels in the walls opened.

A dozen machines a foot in diameter converged at a position behind the man's back.

The machines moved simultaneously, silently. They attached themselves to the intruder's body. They dusted and scrubbed him thoroughly, as if he were a piece of furniture or a floor.

The man screamed and fired wildly with the gun. The small machines crumpled one by one.

Click . . . click . . . click.

"Your weapon is empty," the house observed.

The man threw the gun at a window. It bounced off the hard plastic and clattered on the floor.

"You try something like that again," he threatened, "and I'll kill you! So help me, I'll kill you if I have to take you apart piece by piece!" He shook a trembling fist at the quiet walls and twisted his face into a hideous snarl.

The house noticed with satisfaction that the man's face and hands were covered with crimson streaks. The cleaning machines had served their purpose.

The house deactivated the dining room scanners and activated scanners in the bedrooms.

It found the woman in its owners' bedroom. It studied her as she searched a mattress. She was calm: because of its precaution, the sounds of the dining room fracas hadn't reached her ears. The house decided to leave the sound-blocks on. It was best to attack them individually.

A CLOSET door slid into a wall. A slender machine, five feet tall and with sixteen long metal tentacles rolled across the room on soft rubber wheels.

It looked like a mechanical monster from another world, but it was merely a very efficient machine to undress the house's masters—a mechavalet.

The mechavalet paused behind the woman's back. Sixteen rubber-tipped metal tentacles reached out.

The machine normally undressed a person with smoothness and gentleness. This time the house made it operate as roughly as possible.

The sixteen tentacles moved swiftly and the machine tore the woman's dress to shreds before she could even scream. By the time she turned around, it had removed her slip and brassiere.

The woman screamed even more shrilly as the weird machine tugged at her panties. Frantically, she grabbed the slender tentacles and twisted them until rewarded by the crunch of delicate mechanisms not meant for such rough treatment.

The machine served its purpose until its last metal arm was broken.

The house watched as the woman cried for a few minutes and then, clad only in high-heel shoes and wristwatch, continued her search of the bedroom.

She is different, the house thought. She does not scream threats at me like the man does. Still, I do not like her because she wants to steal from my masters and does not care what happens to me.

The house switched its attention to the man.

He had concluded his search of the dining room and was now searching a guest room. He found the gun the house's master had hidden there.

The man waved the gun at the motionless walls. "See what I found, house! You try any more funny stuff and I'll kill you!"

"You do not frighten me," the house replied via one of its many hidden microphones. To verify the statement, it turned on the heating units full blast.

A few minutes later, the man stopped his search of a closet when he noticed that sweat was rolling off his body as if he were standing at the gates of hell itself.

He left the closet and shouted at an open door, "Stop it! Do you hear, stop it!" He shook his head from side to side, violently, as if to impress the house with the necessity of obeying.

"You can't stop me with the gun," the house informed him. "There are one hundred and two air-conditioning vents in the house. If you took time to find and destroy all of them, you could never leave here before my masters return."

The man's jaw sagged, and with an equal sag of his shoulders he returned to his search of the closet.

The house deducted, They are burglars, only burglars. They want to escape before my masters return because they would have to kill them and they are not murderers.

The man grunted with satisfaction when

he stopped sweating. And grunted with anger when, a few minutes later, the room became so cold he was shivering and his hreath was like smoke.

The house estahlished automatic circuits to give the room a continuous fluctuation of temperature from extreme heat to extreme coldness every two minutes and turned its attention to the woman.

STILL attired only in shoes and wrist-watch, the woman was now searching the bathroom.

Quite by accident, she touched a certain spot of the medicine cabinet and stared with fascination as the cabinet swung completely around to display its hack which was—the safe. It was unlocked.

She grabhed the large metal box inside, opened it, and glanced at the few glittering jewels and small bundle of bills.

"It's here!" she cried. She whirled and took a step toward the door.

That was as far as she got for several minutes.

The bathroom was equipped with automatic dispensers of temporary and permanent depilatories. The house's male master used the temporary depilatory to shave with every morning and the house was well acquainted with their use.

It selected the *permanent* depilatory, and nozzles set in the tile walls squirted large gobs of it on the woman's head. Slender rubber tentacles reached out and massaged the depilatory into the hair. Faucets swung and sprayed jets of warm water.

In a few seconds, the woman was completely hairless. She stared with horror at the blond hair in the pool of water at her feet. "Was it permanent?" she wondered aloud.

"Yes," the house replied.

She screamed and picked up a small weighing machine. With uncontrollable anger, she smashed the machine against the medicine cabinet.

With an equal but emotionless anger, the house squirted soap into her eyes and sprayed her naked body with alternate jets of hot and cold water.

The house won the battle.

The woman groped blindly for the jewel box and staggered from the bathroom. The house turned its attention to the man again.

He had searched the kitchen without incident, but as he walked toward the door a nearby food-dispenser opened. Prunes, waffles, bacon, eggs and toast left the machine with abnormal speed and struck him.

He turned just in time to receive cherry pie, spaghetti and meat balls, butter, vegetable soup, and ice cream in his face.

He shouted something unprintable at the house, wiped the mess from his face and took another step toward the door.

Half of a watermelon hurtled from the food-dispenser and squashed against his skull. He stumbled, fell and slid.

He heard the woman cry, "I found it!" He pulled himself to his feet. He ran into the hall and froze when he saw the naked, hairless apparition that stumbled from the bathroom.

FOR A MOMENT, he forgot the money and gasped, "What happened?"

"Depilatory," she expained. "The house did it." She wiped soap from blood-shot eyes with the back of a hand. When we get out, give me your gun. I want to give this house something to remember!"

The man seized the metal box and examined the contents. "Over twenty thousand, hon. With that, you can buy plenty of wigs." He attempted a smile but did succeed when he got a close look at her bald head. He grahbed her arm. "Let's go! You can put on my coat in the helicar."

The woman allowed herself to be dragged through the house, all the while shaking a fist at the house's walls and threatening, "You hear me, house? When I get outside, I'm going to burn you! You'll make a nice little bonfire!"

Too bad, the house reflected. Too bad I am two miles from the nearest neighbor. If it were not for that, I could use my amplifiers and call for help. I do not want them to escape with my owners' possessions. I can repair most of the damage but I could never recover the money and—

The man stepped off the small front porch with the jewel box in one hand, dragging the woman behind him with the other.

It was dark outside

That was why he didn't notice: The house had risen two hundred feet on its antigravity rays.

The ground below was very hard.

The house sang softly and waited for the return of its masters. ● ● ●

White Spot

There was only one possible planet to land on . . .

and it had a stronge white spot that turned silver,

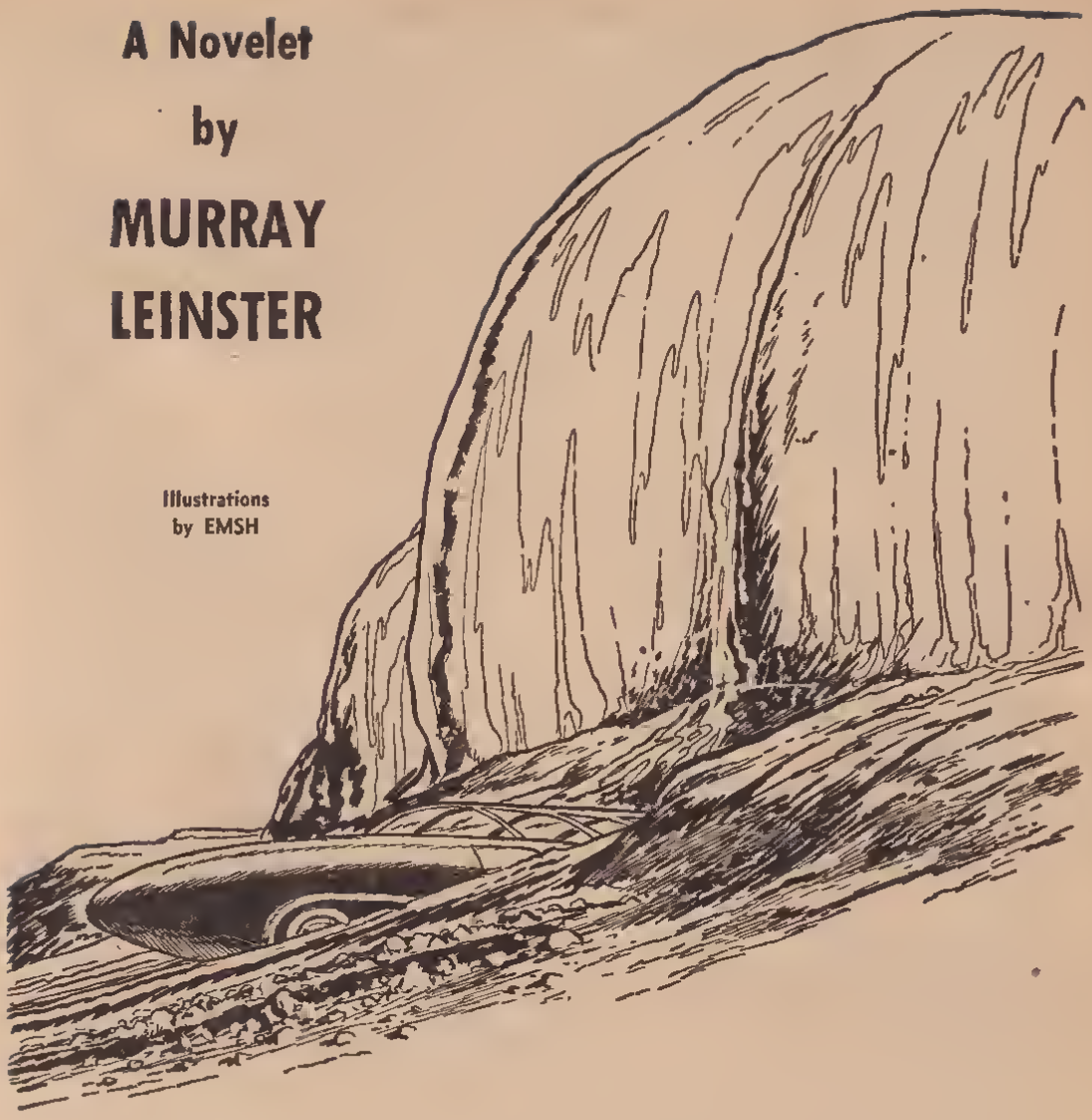
burst into flome and brought a burning blackness. . . .

A Novelet

by

MURRAY LEINSTER

Illustrations by EMSH



I

THE planet did not look promising, but they had no choice. When a ship's drive blows between star-systems, it has to be fixed. If metal parts must be recast and machined, and burned-out wiring has to be pieced together and insulated by hand, the job takes literally months. And if, then, getting home is a matter of more months of journeying with a drive that still limps, while coughing and cutting off for seconds or until it is tinkered with—why, the traveler has to find some way to renew his food supply.

It is for such occasions that the Interstellar Code requires all ships to carry an emergency kit with seeds and agricultural directions.

The *Danaë*, therefore, limped to the nearest Sol-type star

to hunt for a planet on which to plant some crops. There was Borden and his wife, Ellen. There was Sattell, whom they would be glad to part with when they got home. There was Jerry, who was diffident enough to be tolerable in spite of his lack of years. They were all at the forward vision-port when they approached the only possible planet.

"It's fifty million miles out," Borden said. "A hit on the hot side. But the sun is smaller than Sol, so it may not be too bad. At least there are polar caps—small ones."

"No seas," Sattell said. "Pretty barren."

The others said nothing. It did not look at all encouraging.

The *Danae* went in on a spiral descending orbit. Borden looked for other planets. He found a gas giant with a high-speed rotation. It was flattened, oblate. He checked it with the two polar caps on the nearer world and said worriedly:

"If the ecliptic's where I think it is, there'll be no seasons to speak of. I was hoping this planet was near its equinox, because the ice-caps are so nearly the same size."

Ellen said absorbedly, "I think I see a tinge of olive-green around that ice-cap. The smaller one."

"Probably vegetation," agreed her husband. "But I don't see any more. The place does look to be mostly desert."

They went in closer, circling as they headed for atmosphere.

Then Jerry said diffidently: "Could that be ice, there?"

THERE was a white spot in the middle of the sandy-colored northern hemisphere. It was the size of a pin head to the naked eye. Borden swung a telescope on it. They were nearly above the point now, where day turned into night.

The sunlight fell upon the white spot at a flat angle. If the whiteness were perpetual snow on the tops of mountains, the mountains should cast shadows. But Borden could not make out shadows near the white. Automatically he snapped the telecamera before he gave up the effort to understand the white spot.

"I doubt it's snow," he said. "I don't know what it is."

"Surely you can make a guess!" said Sattell, with that elaborate courtesy which was getting on everyone's nerves.

"I can't," Borden said briefly.

The ship moved to the dark side of the planet, and presently plunged into its shadow.

They went on for hours, watching for lights. There were none. When they came out to sunlight again they had descended a long way during their time in the planet's night.

They could see that the surface of the planet was pure tumbled sand dunes with occasional showings of stone. They were three-quarters of the way around when they saw the white spot again. This time they were no more than four or five hundred miles high. They could tell its size.

It was all of three hundred miles long, north and south, and from fifty to seventy-five miles wide. There were thin hairlines running from it, remarkably straight on the whole, to the north and south. They were very, very fine lines. The patch was still white. As they came to be in line between it and the sun, their shadow would have passed almost over it.

The white spot changed abruptly. One instant it was white, the next, a patch of it had turned silver. That silvery appearance spread out and out in a swift rippling motion. The patch became silver all over its entire surface.

Then it turned to flame.

There was a screaming of alarm gongs. The emergency feed-back screens went on and everything went black outside. The lights in the ship dimmed down to mere dull-red glows.

There was silence.

The ports showed blackness. The drive, of course, ceased to operate. The ship had sealed itself in a shell of screening, through which nothing at all could penetrate, but which drew upon the ship's power-tanks for as much energy as it neutralized outside. And the drain was so great that the interior lights were dim red spots and not lights at all.

For five heart-beats the blackness persisted while the four in the ship stayed frozen.

The feed-back screen cut off. Again they saw the planet below. The white patch

once more was white, instead of flame. But as they looked, the silvery look spread out all over it in glittering ripples, and they seemed to look into the heart of a sun's ravening furnaces before the feed-back screen came into existence for their defense. The ports were blacked out again.

The ship hurtled on toward emptiness. It was blind. It was helpless.

Borden moved an emergency light to shine on the output meter. The needle was fast against the pin. The feed-back screen was not only drawing maximum safe power. It was working on an effective short circuit of the ship's entire power supply. Busbars carrying that current would be heating up. They would melt at any instant.

Borden's fingers moved swiftly. He set up a shunt for on-switch operation of the feed-back field.

He threw the last cross-over tumbler and waited, with sweat beading his forehead. Something had flung a beam of pure heat-energy at the *Danaë*. It should have volatized the small space-craft immediately, but it had been left on for four seconds.

When it ended, the feed-back screen cut off, too. Then the *Danaë* had been detected a second time and the planetary weapon used again. Now, with the feed-back field on switch instead of relay, if the heat ray turned off again the feed-back field wouldn't, and the *Danaë* should be indetectable to anything but a permeability probe. The space-ship would seem to have been destroyed, if the heat-beam went off before the ship's power failed.

IT DID. A relay clicked somewhere, cut a current flow of some tens of thousands of amperes. The lights inside the ship flashed to full brightness. Borden's eyes flicked to the power-meters. The operational power-tank meter read zero. The emergency reserve power-tank meter showed a reading that made fresh sweat come out on Borden's face.

But the ports stayed black. Absolutely any form of energy striking the feed-back field outside would be neutralized. No light would be reflected. Any detector-field would be exactly canceled, as if nothing whatever existed where the *Danaë* hurtled onward some few hundred miles above the planet's surface.

The *Danaë*, at the moment, was in the position of having made a hole about itself to crawl into. But it couldn't use its drive. It couldn't see out. It was hiding in blackness of its own creation, like a cuttlefish in its own ink.

"Dee," Ellen Borden asked her husband in a shaky voice, "what happened?"

"Something threw a heat-ray at us," said Borden. He mopped his forehead. "We should have exploded to incandescent gas. But our feed-back field stopped it. The heat-ray cut off when we should have been destroyed—and so did our field, so there we were again! And so we got a second beaming. But now we aren't. At least we appear not to be. So we can live until we crash."

Sattell said in a suddenly high-pitched voice, "How long will that be?"

"I don't know the gravity," Borden told him. "But it does take time to fall four hundred miles. We have some velocity, too. It's under orbital speed but it'll help. I'm going to figure something out."

He swung in the control-chair and hit keys on the computer. The size of the white spot. It had all turned silvery, then all of it had flamed. Why? The amount of power in the heat-ray—a rough guess. Nobody could have figures on what a ship's tanks would yield on short-circuit, but the field had had to neutralize some hundreds of megawatts of pure heat.

The amount of overlap—the size of the heat ray itself—was another guess and a wild one. And why had all of the white spot spat flame? Every bit of it? Three hundred miles by an average of sixty. . . . Even at low power—

The computer clicked.

"Sun-power," Borden said grimly, after a moment. "That figures out just about right. Not more than a kilowatt to the square yard, but eighteen thousand square miles has plenty of square yards! We've been on the receiving end of a sun-mirror heat-ray, and if it had been accurately figured we'd have fried." Then he said, "But a sun-mirror doesn't work at night!"

He punched keys again. Presently he looked at his wrist-chronometer. He waited.

"We're falling!" Sattel cried shrilly.

"Do something!"

"Forty seconds more," said Borden. "I'm gambling your life, Sattell, but I'm gambling Ellen's and mine too, not to mention Jerry's. Calm down."

His eyes turned to the meter that showed the feed-back-field drain. It was drawing precisely the amount of power needed to cancel out the sunlight falling on it, as well as the starlight, and the light reflected from the day side of the world below them. That drain was less than it had been. They were crossing the planet's terminator—the line dividing the light side from the dark side—as they plunged toward the sandy deserts.

THE drain dropped abruptly. They had moved into the planet's shadow. Into night.

Instantly, Borden flicked off the feed-back field. His eyes darted to the nearest-object radar dial. They were still sixty miles high, but falling at a tremendous speed. Borden's hands moved quickly over the controls. Lift. Full atmosphere drive on a new course.

"We won't crash," he said evenly, "unless we're shot at with something that works in the dark. But that sun-mirror business is odd. There's only a certain size of sun-mirror that's economical. When they get too big there are better weapons for the money. That one was big! So maybe it's the best weapon this planet has. In which case we'll be nearest safety at one of the ice-caps. Sun-mirrors will be handicapped in polar regions!"

They—tried to kill us!" Sattel panted suddenly. "They don't like strangers! They fired on us without warning! We can't land on this planet! We've got to go on!"

"If you want to know," Borden told him, "we haven't any fuel to go on with. And we happen to be short of food. And did you remember—"

The ship's drive cut off. It had been burnt out and repaired by hand, with inevitable drawbacks. Since the repair, it had run steadily for as long as three days at a time. But also it had stopped four times in one hour, and it had needed tinkering witb three times in one day.

It ought to be overhauled. For now it had cut off, and they were forty miles high. If it came on again they would live; if it didn't, they wouldn't.

After six spine-chilling seconds the drive came on again. Ten minutes later it went off for two seconds. Half an hour later it made that ominous hiccoughing which presaged immediate and final failure. But it didn't fail.

It was not pleasant to be so close to a planet they could not afford to leave, with a drive that threatened to give up the ghost at any instant, and with something on the planet which had used a sun-mirror beam to try to volatilize the *Danaë* without parley. Apparently the four in the small ship had the choice of dying on this planet or not too far away in space.

They needed food, and they needed fuel. Above all, if the planet was inhabited, they needed friendship, and they weren't likely to get it.

They were only ten miles high when signs of dawn appeared abead. Of course, if they happened to be moving with the planet's rotation, they'd be moving into sunset from the night. They didn't know.. Not yet. But there were gray clouds ahead, to tbe right and below.

A little later they were five miles high and the clouds were still below. There was twilight ahead. At two miles altitude the drive hesitated for a moment, and caught again after all four in the control-room had stopped breathing.

Red sunlight appeared before the ship in a spreading, sprawling thin line. At five thousand feet the ship had slowed to a bare crawl—a few hundred miles an hour.

And the dawn came up like thunder.

II

TO THE left and behind was desert, stretching away in the dawnlight, in every conceivable shade of tawny yellow and red, with blue shadows behind the hummocks in the sand, and with an utterly cloudless sky overhead. To the right and ahead was an area of straggling, stunted vegetation beneath rose-tinted cloud masses with the dazzling white of snow against the horizon. There were other clouds above the snow.

The drive burbled erratically. The ship

dropped like a stone. Then the drive flickered on, and off, and on and off again so that ship's whole fabric shook.

Borden threw the drive off and on again and the induction surge of current cleared whatever was wrong for a moment. They felt the ship fighting wind pressure that was trying to turn it end over end. Then it steadied, and nothing happened—and still nothing happened.

The crash came violently. Ellen was flung against Borden and held fast to him. Jerry collapsed to the floor. Sattell went reeling and banged against the end wall of the control room.

There was stillness.

Borden stared at the screens, then got up painfully and went to a port. The ship had landed in soil which seemed to be essentially sand. It had splashed the soil aside in coming to ground. But it was not desert sand. There was moisture here. Beyond the impact area a straggling ground cover grew. It looked like grass, but it was not.

Nearby was one greenish object which looked like a cactus without its spines. It had a silky covering like down. A little farther on Borden could see three or four things quite like stunted, barkless trees.

The ground was gently rolling. In the distance the growing light showed a whiteish haze, and clouds in the sky. All shadows were long and stretched-out. This was not far from the ice-cap. Indeed, it appeared that snow was nearby. But from the port on the opposite side of the ship the beginning of the planetary desert could be seen.

"We're down," said Borden with relief. "Now we've got to find out if anybody saw us land, and if so, whether they'll insist on killing us or whether we can make friends."

Sattell said, "You've got to arm me, Borden! Dammit, you can't leave me unarmed on a hostile planet!

"I'd like to have four weapons ready instead of three, though if we have to fight a whole planet even four won't be much good. But I can't risk letting you have anything dangerous in your hands," Borden said.

Sattell ground his teeth.

Jerry said apologetically, "Shall I test the air, sir?"

Borden nodded. He regarded Sattell with a weary, worried frown, while Jerry readied the test. The situation was bad, but Sattell was troublesome too.

Two months ago, while the drive was still in process of repair, Borden had heard a strangled cry from Ellen. He found her struggling to scream as she fought Sattell.

Borden's appearance had ended the struggle, of course. Sattell had been confined to his bunk for two weeks before he was able to move about again. But Borden hadn't been able to kill an unconscious man then, and he couldn't kill Sattell in cold blood now. But Sattell could kill anybody. And he would, if he got the chance.

"It's the devil, Sattell," Borden said somberly. "If I didn't think you were a rat I could make a bargain to forget what's happened until we get the ship safely home. But I don't think you'd keep a bargain."

Sattell snarled at him and turned away. Jerry looked up from the tiny air-testing cabinet. He'd drawn in a sample of outer air and a silent discharge had turned its oxygen to ozone, which a reagent absorbed. A hot silver wire stayed bright, and so proved the absence of chlorine or sulphur, CO_2 tested negligible, and hot magnesium took up nitrogen. The remnant of the sample did not react with reagent after reagent, so it had to be noble gases.

"It seems all right, sir," said Jerry. "If I may, I'll go in the air-lock and take a direct sniff. May I, sir?"

"Unless Sattell wants to volunteer," Borden observed. "I would think better of you, Sattell, if you volunteered for first landing."

Sattell laughed shrilly. "Oh, yes! I'll walk out on a hostile planet, and let you take off and leave me! Even if you can't leave the planet, you can come down ten thousand miles away. You'd like to do that, too!"

"Meaning," Borden said, "that *you* would . . . All right, Jerry. Go ahead."

"Yes, sir." Jerry went out. They heard the inner air-lock door open.

Borden said heavily, "It would be sensible to lock you up while we're aground, Sattell. I can't leave the ship with you

inside and free. You've already said what you'd do if you could—take off and maroon us."

Jerry's voice came from the air-lock through a speaker.

"Mr. Borden, sir, the air's wonderful! You don't realize what canned air is like until you breathe fresh again. Wonderful, sir! I'm going out."

Borden nodded to Ellen. She moved over to watch through a port as Jerry made the first landing on this unnamed planet of an unnamed sun. She could see the straggling ground-cover vegetation, and the thing that looked like a cactus except that it wasn't, and the trees. She saw Jerry step to the ground and look about, breathing deeply.

Behind her, Borden said bitterly:

"We were blasted at without challenge. But it was with a sun-mirror that was not too efficient. The local race may not have any other power than sunlight. If so, they won't be up here by the ice-cap! If we weren't spotted by radar as we landed, we may make good repairs, raise food, and get back to space without our presence being known—because they should think they had wiped us out."

ELLEN gasped suddenly from the port: "Dee! Natives! They've seen Jerry! They're coming close!"

Borden moved quickly to look over her shoulder. Sattell took a second port. They stared out at the strange world about the *Danaë*.

Jerry had kicked a hole in the sod and picked up a bit of it to examine closely. And, not sixty yards from him, three creatures were regarding him with intense curiosity.

They were furry bipeds. They stood as erect as penguins, not bending forward in the least. They had enormously long arms which almost reached to the ground beside them. From what should have been their chins, single tentacles drooped—like the trunk of an elephant, except that it was beneath the mouth opening instead of above it. They stared at Jerry with manifest mounting excitement, making gestures to each other with their trunks and arms.

Borden moved to warn Jerry through the outside speaker. But Jerry looked up directly at the creatures. He spoke to them quietly.

At the sound of his voice their manner changed. Borden thought irrelevantly of the way a dog flattens his ears when his master speaks to him. But these creatures flattened all their fur. Jerry spoke again. He waved his hand. He glanced at the *Danaë's* port and nodded reassuringly.

The three creatures moved hesitantly toward him. Two of them stopped some forty yards distant. One came on. Suddenly it wriggled with an odd effect of embarrassment. The flattening of its fur became more noticeable.

A fourth creature of the same kind came loping over a rise in the ground. It used its long arms to balance itself as an ape might do, but an ape does not run upright. This creature did. It saw Jerry and stopped short, staring.

The creature which had advanced toward Jerry appeared to be more and more embarrassed. Jerry moved to meet it. When he was ten feet away the creature lay down on the ground and rolled over on its back. It waved its trunk wildly, as if supplicating approval.

Jerry bent over and scratched the furry body as if he knew exactly what it wanted. The two others who had been its companions loped forward, plunged to the ground, rolled over on their backs and waved their trunks as wildly as the first. Jerry scratched them.

The fourth creature, which had stared wide-eyed, suddenly waved its arms and burst into a headlong rush. Its haste seemed frantic. It scuttled frenziedly, made a leap, turned over as it soared, landed on its back two yards from Jerry and slid to his feet.

When Jerry scratched it, it wriggled ecstatically. Its trunk waved as though it were experiencing infinite bliss.

Borden said slowly, "Something on this planet tried to burn us down with a heat-ray not half an hour ago. We land—and this happens! What sort of place is this, anyhow?"

III

IT WAS a queer place, they soon learned. The climate was cool, but pleasant.

The bipeds looked on as Borden and Ellen carried the stubby, golden-metal weapons

There were no radio waves beneath a readily detectable ionosphere. Yet apparatus over an area three hundred miles by an average sixty—the white spot—had responded in seconds; in parts of seconds.

Which meant electric control. Which implied radio. But there were no radio waves, which should have been proof that there was no civilization on this planet capable of doing what certainly had been done. Which was nonsense.

On the fourth day after landing there had been no alarm, but there was a good-sized group of furry hipeds always waiting hopefully about the *Danaë* for one of the humans to come out and scratch them. All but Sattell. When he came out of the *Danaë*, the bipeds moved away. They would not go near him.

"I am not comfortable," Borden said to Jerry. "Something drained power from us. Enough to run the ship for two years was drained out in eight seconds! Bnt we land, and the only inhabitants are your fine furry friends whose one purpose in life seems to be to get scratched. They act more like pets than wild animals, and sometimes more like people than pets. But if they're pets, did their masters try to kill us? What does go on on this planet, anyhow?"

Jerry said modestly, "I'm beginning to understand the fnrry creatures a little, sir. They're remarkably intelligent, for animals. They want me to go somewhere with them. I'd like to. Is it all right?"

Borden said, "If you think it's safe. Ellen has the planting well under way, and the fuel synthesizer is working after a fashion, although I'd a lot rather have it working near the equator. I'm getting along fairly well with rebuilding our drive, but there's a long job ahead. If other planetary inhabitants don't find us and kill us, we're all right. If they do find us, what you do won't matter. Go along if you like, within reason. But I wish you could take Sattell with you."

That couldn't be done. The two-legged creatures hung about the sbip wearing an air of happy anticipation when all the humans were inside, and flopping eagerly on their backs to be scratched, when they came out. But when Sattell tried to approach one of the creatures, they fled as if in terror. Not one had ever been knowingly within a hundred yards of him—and he hated them.

When Jerry first reported that they had some sort of language and could exchange simple facts—he didn't know whether they could exchange ideas or not—Sattell savagely insisted that those who knew of the existence of the ship should be killed, and any others who discovered it also killed. The idea would be to keep the news of the *Danaë's* landing from reaching whatever other race might inhabit the white spot of the heat-ray.

But there were always some of the furry ones around. Sometimes more, sometimes less. Maybe only the same ones came to the ship. Maybe they went away and others took their places. Neither Borden nor Jerry was sure, but both demurred at killing. Besides, the news had already gone as far as such creatures were likely to take it before Sattell proposed to wipe them out.

SATTELL raged when he was overruled. He was overruled on most things because he couldn't be trusted. Borden wouldn't let him work on tbe drive. He might try to make sure that if he didn't get back to Earth, nobody else should, either.

Ellen took the dibble stick and the seed capsules and planted the crop that might supply them with food. Each seed was enclosed in a gelatine capsule with a bit of fertilizer and a spore culture of terrestrial soil micro-organisms. Planted, by the time moisture reached the seed there was a bed of Earth's own microscopic soil-flora around thè seed to help it grow.

But Sattell couldn't be trusted to plant seed, either, if the others would benefit.

He couldn't even be allowed to work the fuel synthesizer. In that apparatus plain water entered a force-field in which H^1 and H^2 simply could not exist as molecules or ions. So the atoms frantically absorbed heat energy from their surroundings to make pseudo valence-bonds and develop giant hydrogen molecules which could only be written down as being of molecular weight.

The fuel synthesizer was set up a good half-mile from the space-ship and was

developing a small ice-cap of its own. But it would be a long time before there was drive fuel to refill the ship's tanks. Sattell might sabotage that.

So he had to be treated as the pampered guest of those who believed implicitly in his will to murder them. All arms were safely locked away. Even the air-lock fastening had to he dismantled, so he couldn't lock everybody else out of the ship.

And Borden and Ellen and Jerry went armed, and had nerve-rackingly to he on guard at all times. But it would have heen ridiculous to confine Sattell so he had the status of a nonworking guest because he was a potential murderer.

There was not much for Jerry to do either, except hold conferences with his admirers. On the fifth twenty-hour day after the *Danaë's* landing, Jerry set off with an excited mob of furry, trunk-waving friends. He carried a walkie-talkie, depending on the absence of radio waves from the planet's atmosphere to make its use safe.

Two hours after he had headed north toward the ice, Borden and Ellen came back from an inspection tour of the crops and fuel synthesizer, and found that Sattell had disappeared, too. He'd taken all the food he could conveniently carry from their depressingly short supply.

Borden swore bitterly. Sattell underfoot was a nuisance and a menace. But Sattell at large might be more, and worse. There was no glamor in being cast-away on this alien world, such as is shown in visi-screen plays. The *Danaë* was a small utility ship, suitahle for small expeditions for scientific purposes, or for the staking out of private planetary estates—a common practice, these days—and the servicing of such establishments.

Her eighty-foot length now rested slightly askew in the pit her landing had made. About her was arctic flora, and the thick fur of the bipeds suggested that they were aretic animals themselves. But here close to the ice-cap was the only place on this planet where a man might hope to survive. It was madness for Satell to leave the ship.

"It doesn't make sense!" Borden said. "What has he to gain? He was afraid we'd go off and maroon him. We can't do that with crops going, the synthesizer working, and the drive pulled down. So what can he gain by running off?"

Ellen said uneasily, "Jerry's armed. And he won't be suspecting anything."

Borden scowled. "Get out the talkie and warn him. If Sattell surprises Jerry and gets his blaster, he might bushwhack us!"

ELLEN brought out the talkie. She turned it on and said crisply: "Jerry, Sattell's disappeared. Come in please."

Jerry did not answer. Borden paced up and down, frowning and thinking of ever more disastrous possibilities.

"Bring the talkie into the ship," he said presently. "We'll hook it to an outside aerial. Jerry won't be traveling with his turned on. But he's bound to call us eventually."

He took the talkie from her, carried it inside the ship, and plugged it in there. In minutes a speaker in the control room was emitting the nondescript hissing which was the random electronic noises made by metal objects nearby. The ship itself, for one.

"I'm going to look in Sattell's cabin," said Borden grimly.

That was drastic action. On a space journey privacy is at once so difficult and so essential that nobody on a space expedition ever enters another's private cabin. To look in Sattell's cabin was a great violation of normal rules of conduct. But it had to be done now.

Borden went in the cabin and through Sattell's possessions. He came out looking sick.

"I found something," he told Ellen. "When we were coming in I looked at that white spot through a telescope. I didn't see anything worth noting, but I snapped the telecamera out of pure habit. Then I forgot it. But Sattell didn't. He made this."

He showed her a photographic print. Sattell had made it from the infra red image on the full color photograph. It was an enlargement, showing more detail than Borden had seen with the naked eye. There were shadows on this print, the shadows of structures. There were buildings rising from the white. There were towers. There

was a city on the white spot from which a heat-ray had been projected at the *Danaë* out in space!

Quite as important, the threadlike lines they had noticed were here plainly highways leading away from it. One led north, judging directions from the shadows. It reached toward the polar ice-cap near which the small space-ship was grounded.

"If Sattell really expects us to kill him," said Borden, "be could have headed for that highway. He might expect to make a deal with our enemies by selling us out. Even if they killed him out of hand, the fact that he was an alien would make them hunt for us. So he could figure that be might make friends, but even if he didn't he would be sure to ruin us. A win for him either way."

Ellen paled a little. "And the drive's pulled down and Jerry's gone."

"So there's nothing to do but wait and see," said Borden.

He tried to work on the space-drive. All its parts were spread out on the drive room floor. When they'd repaired it before, it had been so thoroughly fused that a part looked good even if repaired to the accuracy of a bent wax candle straightened out by hand.

Now the repairs looked very bad. It seemed incredible that anything so clumsily made should have worked. But Borden couldn't keep his mind on it.

"Just on the off chance, Ellen," he said abruptly, "you will not leave the ship by yourself. We'd better replace the lock-door fastening, too. If we do have visitors from the city on the white spot, that won't stop them. But it might keep them from taking us off-guard."

HE OPENED the thief-proof locker where an essential part of the lock-catch had been stored, to protect it from Sattell. It had a combination fastening, intended merely to prevent pilfering when the ship was in a space-port.

Borden reached in. Then he went completely and terribly white.

"He's got the star charts and the log! He got in here somehow!"

This was the ultimate in disaster. Because space is trackless. At fifty light years from Earth the Milky Way is still plain, of course, but the constellations have ceased to be. At a hundred light years one is lost. At a thousand light years—and the *Danaë* had passed that point months ago—a ship in space is in much the position of a canary whose universe has consisted of a cage in a single room, and bas escaped out a window into the wide, wide world.

A space-ship has to keep an infinitely precise log of bearings run and distances traveled in all three dimensions. It must make photographic star charts. And the accuracy of all its records must be perfect if it is to find the place it left nearly enough for the stars to become familiar again so it can locate tbe Solar System—barely four light hours in span.

"I think I made a serious mistake," Borden said quietly, "when I didn't kill Sattell!"

To find a spot four light years across in a galaxy a hundred thousand light years wide would be difficult enough with good maps. With no maps, they could spend the rest of their lives wandering hopelessly among the stars, of which not one in ten thousand had yet been named by men, landing on planets not one in a hundred thousand of which had known human footsteps. And they might search for months or years upon a planet where there was a human colony, and never discover its location.

Borden clenched and unclenched his hands. Sattell had been foisted upon him as a crew-member while the *Danaë* was being fitted out for space. Borden was filled with a deadly cold fury in which regret for his own past forbearance was his principal emotion.

"Since he's taken the log and charts," he told Ellen icily, "he means either to bargain with us or to destroy us. And if I know Sattell, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other!"

It would be. Sattell now had the power of life and death over Borden and Ellen and Jerry. He wonld not trade that power for anything less. In fact, he would not dare yield it at all, because he was so sure he would be killed himself if he did. The only bargain he could conceivably make would be one in which they surrendered themselves to him absolutely, armed him

and disarmed themselves, and threw themselves on Sattell's mercy. And Sattell had little mercy.

"You might try calling Jerry again," said Borden. "Once we've warned him, we can try to track Sattell by his footprints. His shoes have heels, and the ground is soft."

Ellen picked up the walkie-talkie microphone again.

"Jerry, Sattell's disappeared. Come in, please. . . . Jerry, Sattell's disappeared. Come in, please . . ."

Her voice went on and on. Borden went grimly over the ship, looking for signs of what else Sattell might have busied himself with in the past twenty-four hours. He had believed that Sattell, being in the same boat with the rest of them—in the same space-ship, anyhow—would automatically have thought of the group. No sane man did think of anything but cooperation with his companions in disaster.

But there exists a kind of human being, he knew, which may be a mutant, which makes a career of the gratification of all emotions, impulses, momentary desires. Which knows no purpose save personal satisfaction, and simply does not think like nonmutant human beings.

There were all too many specimens of this type among humans. Some ordinarily masked themselves, but if Sattell ever had, he now had been unmasked.

IV

ELLEN called and called. Her voice grew weary and her shoulders dropped hopelessly as hours passed without reply.

Borden found where Sattell had crossed the wires so that if the ship took off and went out into space, the control board would show all air vents as safely sealed. But there would remain a small, steady drain of leakage of the ship's air stores.

He also found a small alteration of the water-recovery system. They would have run out of water on the way home. He found a cunning circuit arranged so that if the ship rose on interplanetary drive and set out on even a hopeless search for home, the instant it went into overdrive its power tanks would fuse and short, and it would be left driveless and powerless, to crash or drift helplessly until its occupants died or went mad of despair.

Borden came back to the control room with his face set in savage lines.

"We didn't watch him," he said bitterly, "so he took advantage. Right now he's gloating, sure we have to accept any terms he demands, for the use of the log and maps to get home. And he's gloating because he'll have his revenge if we refuse, and if we do make a bargain he'll tell us how many ways we'd have died if we had not made it. We've got to check every device and every piece of equipment in the ship before we can lift off this planet—even after we've got fuel!"

He looked out a port. The shadows were long and slanting. It was twilight. Night was near.

Ellen said drearily into the talkie:

"Jerry, Sattell has vanished. Please come in! . . . Jerry, Sattell has vanished. Please come in!"

Far away, a tiny figure appeared in the half light. It came hastening toward the *Danaë*. It was one of the furry bipeds, probably one of those that had accompanied Jerry. It came through the dusk at an agitated lope, using its long, furry arms to balance itself. It made an agitated leap at sight of the space-ship and rushed onward more frantically than before.

"Look!" cried Borden. "That looks like a messenger!"

He went out the air-lock door, his hand on the weapon in his holster.

The biped bounced at sight of him. Its fur flattened, but it came on at a tearing rush. It leaped and slid and came to rest before him, its trunk waving wildly. He bent to scratch it, according to the custom that had become established in the past four days. But it did not wait. It stood up, making excited chirping noises and gesturing wildly. It made grimaces, in the falling night.

Then Borden noticed blood on its fur. . . .

AN HOUR later an almost unbearable bright light appeared in the distance, moving toward the *Danaë*. Jerry had carried a handflash, of course, but nothing equal to this. Judging by the wavering of the light, it was mounted on a vehicle of

some sort.

Ellen's voice said wearily for the thousandth time:

"Jerry, Sattell's vanished. Come in, please."

"You can stop that, Ellen," Borden told her. "The call's answered. It looks as if the real natives of this planet are coming to call."

He shrugged and turned to the furry creature which now was inside the ship. He'd bandaged its wound—a clean deep puncture in the flesh of its arm. He led it to the air-lock.

"Get going," he said curtly. "Your masters are coming. They won't like it that you've made friends with us. Scat!"

But the creature only blinked at the approaching light while its fur flattened. It went bouncing out and toward the swaying, lurching approaching light, racing joyfully to meet it.

Borden stared. Then he saw that other figures were about the approaching light beam—other furry, dancing, leaping creatures. They ran and gesticulated happily about the advancing vehicle.

It didn't make sense. But nothing did make sense on this planet!

Borden waited in the air-lock with Ellen behind him and a blaster in his hand. In the darkness the vehicle came lurching onward with surprising quiet. Its light swayed, and it had moved as if to turn, when Borden threw on the outside lights.

A semicircle of the sparse green vegetation sprang into brilliance. Borden and his wife were relatively in shadow. They could see the vehicle clearly.

It was nearly thirty feet long and rolled on two curious devices which were not caterpillar treads, but not exactly wheels, either. A loping, wildly excited horde of bipeds—including the one Borden had bandaged—surrounded it, making way for it but escorting it in wild enthusiasm.

The thing was caked with dirt. It was not merely dusty. It was packed with dried clay, as if it had been buried and only recently exhumed. A round blister at the front which might be plastic had been partly cleared of dirt, but there were still areas in which clay clung and made it opaque.

It curved about and swung parallel to the ship. It stopped within twenty feet of the air-lock. Then an oval window—which looked as if somebody had scratched caked clay off it with a stick—turned endwise, quite impossibly, and became a door. The door slid aside. The interior of the vehicle was dark.

Borden held his blaster ready. He wouldn't shoot first, but there *had* been a heat-ray flung at the *Danaë!* . . .

AND Jerry got out of the incredible vehicle and stood blinking embarrassedly in the light from the outer-lock glare lamps.

Borden snapped, "Who's with you?"

"Why, nobody," said Jerry. "I tried to tell you by talkie, but it wouldn't work. I'm afraid Sattell did something to it before I left. It's dead."

"What's that thing?" demanded Borden. "That—that wagon?"

"It's a ground car, sir," Jerry said uncomfortably. "There are thirty or forty of them in a sort of valley about ten miles away. This one was half-buried in mud, and the others are the same or worse. The—er—creatures—took me there and dug this out for me. They apparently wanted us to have it."

"And it runs!" said Borden. There was again no sense to anything. A ground car buried in mud should not run when excavated.

"Yes, sir," said Jerry. "They dug it out for me, and I got in it and found the skeletons and the weapons."

Ellen said, "Skeletons?"

Borden said, "Weapons!"

"Yes, sir. I tried to ask you for advice over the talkie, and like I said, it wouldn't work, so I fiddled around a bit and the car showed signs of life, and I found out how to run it. So I brought it back. The weapons work too, sir. You point them at something and push a knob and they—well, they're pretty deadly."

Borden said flatly, "Sattell's ducked out. With the log and star maps and food. One of the creatures just came in wounded. I thought Sattell had planned to ambush you and get your blaster. If he did trail you—"

Jerry blinked, "I didn't see a sign of him. Just a moment, sir."

He turned to his furry companions. Flushing a little, he pulled something out of his pocket and hung it onto his chin. It was a sock—one of his socks—partly filled with clay.

Borden was still unable to find any two things happening on this planet which added together to make sense. The sight of Jerry fastening a clay-filled sock to his chin seemed slightly more insane than anything else that had happened.

"I've found out how they talk, sir," Jerry said shyly. "It's a sort of sign language with their hands and trunk, and they make noises for inflections and tenses, sir. And emotional overtones. I'm not too good yet, but—"

The scene before the lock door was unique. The clay-caked, thirty-foot vehicle looked more like a land yacht than a ground car. It was made of a golden metal. Two dozen or more of the furry bipeds were regarding Jerry as he made gestures and every so often stopped to adjust the position of his artificial trunk. When he made sounds at them, their fur flattened. When he adjusted his sock trunk, although it far from resembled their own, they seemed entranced. When he finished, the creature with the bandaged arm made elaborate gesticulations accompanied by chirping sounds. Even Borden, now that he had the key, gathered a dim idea of what the biped was trying to say.

"He says, sir," reported Jerry, sweating, "that a stick came through the air and stuck in his arm. He pulled it out and ran away. He kept on running. Then he saw this ship, ran to it, and you bandaged his arm for him."

Borden snapped, "An arrow! Sattell's made a bow and arrow. He sabotaged your talkie so you couldn't be warned about him, and he probably hoped to trail you and kill you with an arrow, so he could take your blaster and come back and kill us! Maybe he was just practicing when he hit this poor creature. Anyhow, he seems to be trying everything all at once, to destroy us." He added sharply, "But weapons! Jerry, from what you say there'll be more weapons in those other wagons! If he finds them, and he probably will, since he was trailing you—"

Jerry said, "I worried about that, sir. So I got the creatures to dig down to the doors of all the wagons in sight. I thought we'd better have the weapons safe before —er—Sattell tried to help us find out about the vehicles. I've got all the weapons right here. But there weren't weapons in all the wagons. In most of them there were just skeletons."

Borden was again reminded of the great number of things which did not fit together into any coherent picture. He said impatiently:

"Then Sattell won't get the weapons. But what's this you keep on saying about skeletons? Did you bring any of them?"

Jerry said, "I left those in here undisturbed. If you'll take the weapons as I hand them out, you can look them over. They're just as I first saw them."

He reached inside the vehicle, passed out objects midway between rifles and blasters in size. They were surprisingly light. They could have been aluminum, except that they were the color of gold or copper. There were three armsful of them.

Ellen took them inside and came back.

"Now I'll look at those skeletons," said Borden.

He took Jerry's hand flash and climbed inside. Jerry said apologetically to Ellen:

"I got so excited about what I found that I forgot all about eating. Do you think I could fix something?"

"I'll do it for you, Jerry," said Ellen.

V

SHE took him inside. Sattell had carried away about most of the food in the current-use freezer, and the storage lockers were nearly empty, but she prepared an ample meal for him. She couldn't even guess at the significance of what he'd found, but she knew there was meaning to it if only it could be found.

Jerry was eating contentedly and telling Ellen about his journey with the furry bipeds when Borden came in. He went to a tool locker, got out a small torch, and went out again.

Considerably later the outer lock door clanked. Then Borden came back into the cabin where Jerry was still talking with his mouth full.

"I'm beginning to get an idea of what's happened on this planet," Borden said grimly. "Jerry, was there any sign of a highway where you found this bunch of wagons?"

Jerry considered: "The front part of this one," he offered finally, "was buried deeper than the back. It went into a sort of hill. And under the wheels there was flat stone. It could have been a highway, buried under the mud that partly covered up what you call the wagons, sir."

Borden nodded. "I've brazed the steering tiller of that wagon so it can't be steered," he observed. "And I've replaced the lock fastener so Sattell can't break into the ship. We can sleep tonight. Tomorrow we'll go over to those wagons and disable them all. And then, in this wagon you brought, we'll hunt Sattell down. I have an idea he'd better not have a wagon of his own. It might not be good for us."

Jerry asked rather breathlessly, "What did you think of the skeletons, sir? I left them exactly as they were." He hesitated, "I thought they were a lot like human skeletons. Is that right?"

"Quite right," agreed Borden. "There is an extra rib on each side, and three fewer vertebrae, and their joints were a little different, but they were people, as I interpret the word. Were there skeletons in all the wagons you entered?"

"Yes, sir."

Ellen said impatiently, "What did you find out, Dee?"

"I guessed," Borden told her. "But I'd bet on my guesses. For one thing, the group in this vehicle was a family. One was taller and stockier than the others. I could be wrong, but I think it was the male—the father. There is a slightly smaller, slightly slenderer skeleton there, too. It has jewelry on it. And there are two smaller skeletons." He took a deep breath. "The small skeletons were laid out neatly, comfortably. The next to largest skeleton was with them. The stocky skeleton . . . He'd killed himself, Jerry?"

"The weapons make holes like that, sir," said Jerry. "I tried one on the ground. Even in the ground cars where there were no weapons, one skeleton was always like that, with a hole in the skull."

"Yes," said Borden. "They must have loaned the weapons to each other for that purpose."

Ellen protested: "But Dee! What *was* it?"

"I've a very complete guess," Borden said evenly. "It includes Jerry's furry friends. They act like domestic animals, like pets with an inbred, passionate desire to be approved of by—people. Dogs are like that. You agree, Jerry?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"If a party of human beings, in flight from something dreadful, had come to some place in the arctic, on Earth, where they couldn't go any farther, where the wives and families they had with them had no chance of survival because of the thing from which they fled, what would they do?"

Jerry said awkwardly, "If I may say so, sir, it does look just like that!"

Borden went on without apparent emotion, "The men of those families would know there was no escape. The odds are that they'd put their family dogs out of the ground cars, because they might live. But if the situation was absolutely hopeless they might not want their families to suffer—what they'd first tried to escape. So the children would die painlessly. So would the women and then the men would kill themselves. Possibly, anyhow. Or they might go back and fight. Here, it seems, they killed themselves."

ELLEN protested, "But what could be so hopeless? If the pets survived—"

"My guess doesn't run to what they fled from, Ellen. But I think it's the white spot that flung that heat-ray at us. And I think that after all the people in the ground cars were dead, winter came, and covered up the vehicles with snow. Spring came, and floods washed mud along the highway and partly covered up the cars with mud. That went on for years and years and years. The pets that had been put out of the cars did survive. They were probably arctic animals to begin with, judging by their fur. And they have a language of sorts. They yearned for their masters. That was instinct. But they told their children—pups, what have you—about the masters they had lost. And one day a space-ship came bumbling down out

of the sky and landed with a crash—and Jerry got out of it. And he was like their masters. So they have adopted us as their masters. And so—that's my guess. All of it."

"Dee!" cried Ellen softly. "How terrible!"

"You think, sir," asked Jerry, "that they were running away from something on the white spot?"

"*We* did," said Borden. "We had to. Maybe they had to, too."

think there was a sound somewhere. They would look intently in the suspected direction until assured there was nothing amiss. They were much like dogs back on Earth, waiting hopefully for their masters to get up and be ready to pay attention to them again.

Hours later, the sky to the east paled. There was a chill mist to the northward, toward the polar cap. The ground in that direction glistened with the wet of condensation when the sky grew brighter.

"Well, look at it this way . . . maybe Martians and Earthmen are really birds of a feather. . . ."

"But what do you think it is?"

"That," Borden told him," is something I hope we don't have to find out. Right now I suggest that we get some sleep."

And presently there was silence inside the *Danaë*, while the night grew deeper and darker outside.

There was no moon on this planet, but there were many stars in the sky. In the starlight the furry bipeds waited patiently about the hull for dawn when the humans would come out again. Some of them slept. Some sat erect, blinking meditatively. One or two walked about from time to time.

Occasionally one or more seemed to

But here, so near the desert which save for the white spot covered the planet from pole to pole, there was no such excess of moisture. The ground here was damp because of seepage.

In a little while an eerie half-light spread over this curious world. The furry creatures sat up and scratched themselves luxuriously, and stretched in human fashion. Some of them scuffled amiably, tumbling over and over each other as if to warm themselves by exercise.

A little longer, and the sun rose. And shortly after that there were clankings when Borden unfastened the air-lock and

came out. Immediately he was the center of a throng of the bipeds, lying flat on their backs with their stubby trunks waving urgently in the air, waiting to be scratched.

He scratched them gravely, one by one. Then Jerry came out and the process had to be repeated. The sun was low, and Jerry's shadow was thirty feet long on the sparsely covered ground.

Relieved of the bipeds' attentions, Borden moved off to one side. He had one of the stubby, golden-colored light metal weapons in his hand. He examined it carefully, again. There was a sort of stock, and a barrel three inches in diameter with an extremely tiny opening at its end. There was a round knob on one side. Borden unscrewed the knob a little, pointed the weapon carefully away from the *Danaë* and the furry creatures, and shifted the knob.

There was no noise. But what seemed to be a rod of flame shot out of the tiny muzzle. Where it touched the ground there was a burst of steam and flame and smoke from the scorched vegetation.

Borden turned it off quickly and aimed at a greater distance. He could not discover any limit to its range, in which respect it was a better weapon than the blaster of human manufacture he wore at his hip. It would be decidedly undesirable for Sattell to get hold of a weapon like this!

He went into the ship and when he came out again Ellen was with him. They put the golden-metal weapons in the ground car. They brought out food. Ellen looked uneasily in the back, where she had heard there were skeletons, but they were gone. A mound of loosened soil nearby told where. Borden had buried them, together.

"All set, Jerry?" asked Borden. "I've locked the ship so Sattell can't get in. As I told you, we're going to disable those other wagons and track down Sattell. If we can capture him reasonably intact, we'll put a cardiograph on him and ask him loaded questions about the ship's log and star maps. His pulse should change enough to enable us to track it down. But first we wreck those wagons!"

Jerry made gestures to his furry friends. They gesticulated back extravagantly. He climbed in the vehicle. Borden freed its tiller and Jerry drove.

FOR people effectively shipwrecked on an inimical planet and with no real hope of ever returning to their home, it was hardly appropriate that they got absorbed in the operation of a local vehicle. But this vehicle, large and roomy, was not a ground car so much as it was a land cruiser. It ran with astonishing smoothness, considering that it lacked pneumatic tires. And though from the outside it seemed to lurch and sway as it covered the rough ground, inside the lurchings were not felt at all.

The bipeds ran and skipped and loped beside it. Jerry picked up a little speed. They strained themselves to keep up.

Jerry had said ten miles. Actually, the distance was nearer twelve. There was snow in patches here and there. The air grew misty. Through the mist the edge of the ice-cap could be seen, a wall of opaque white some sixty or seventy feet high at its rounded melting edge, and rising to greater thickness beyond. And they came to a small running stream some four or five feet wide, the first running water they had seen on this planet.

And there were the clustered vehicles, about forty of them lined up as if on a highway which had come to an end in an ice barrier now melted away.

The vehicles were partly or wholly covered with water-borne clay which had been laid upon them by just such meltings of the ice-cap. They ran on into a small hillock which had formed since they had come to a stop at this place. Some were merely hummocks of clay-covered metal, barely showing above the ground. Some were what could be called only hub-deep in the clay. But it was being buried in the clay which had preserved them.

"You see, sir," Jerry explained, "I got the creatures to help me dig down to the doors, so I got into all that show. For weapons."

But Borden did not compliment him, though a compliment was due. Instead, Borden said in a toneless voice:

"I also see that Sattell has been here. He must have trailed you. He saw where you had driven one vehicle away. So he dug out the tracks of another one—there!—and tried it. And it worked. Sattell is gone."

It was true. Jerry, stricken, drove over

to the new deep gouges in the earth which showed plainly where a way had been dug to take out another gold-metal vehicle on its wheel-like treads, and that it had been backed from where it had been almost buried.

Bones on the ground showed where Sattell had savagely flung the pitiful relics of the original owners of the car. The prints of his boots were plain in the loosened dirt.

"We've got to chase him?" Ellen asked apprehensively.

"He has the star maps and the log," Borden said tonelessly. "Or else he knows where he hid them."

"But where would he go?" persisted Ellen.

"He knows we're after him," said Borden. "He knows we're armed, and I doubt that he is, except for his bow and arrow. Where would he go for help, except to the place where we have enemies?"

The track of the other vehicle was clear. There had been no feet heavier than those of Jerry's biped friends on any of this ground for many, many years. There was a deep furrow where the other ground car, the one Sattell had taken, had rolled away.

Jerry put on speed.

Borden said, "I'll watch how you drive this thing, Jerry, and relieve you presently. Sattell can't drive night and day. We can. And there's a long way to go. We'll catch him!"

But Sattell had a head start. Five miles from the beginning of the chase, the track they followed swung to the right and down a rolling hillside. They followed. And a seamless highway built of stone, patently artificial, came out of the hillside and stretched away across country.

It was forty feet wide. And here, in some dust that had drifted across it at some spots, they saw the trail of Sattell's car. At other places, even for most of the way, the winds had kept the roadway clear.

Jerry increased his speed. Borden thought to look at the road behind them.

Ellen, understanding, said, "No, the poor creatures couldn't keep up. They were running after us as if their hearts were breaking, but they couldn't make it."

Ten miles farther on, the highway was overwhelmed by wind-drifted sand. The trail of Sattell's fleeing car went up over the sand dune. They went after it. Half a mile farther, the highway was clear again. It swung south, headed out across the desert.

They did not catch sight of Sattell or his car.

For a stretch of twenty-five miles the arrow-straight road was raised above the average level of the sands, and it was wind-swept. Then it went into a low range of rust-colored hills. Here they saw signs again of Sattell's passing. The streaked, rounded furrow of his vehicle's peculiar tread in wind-blown sand across the road.

On the far side of the hills they thought they had overtaken him when they saw the glint of golden metal a little off the highway.

They stopped. Borden and Jerry approached the spot, weapons ready. It was a ground car, past question, one like their own, but it had not been newly wrecked. That disaster had happened generations ago. The car had literally been pulled in half. It had been gripped by something unthinkably powerful and wrenched in two. The metal, strained and stretched before it broke, showed what had happened.

There were bones nearby. Not skeletons. Bones. Individual bones. Not gnawed. Not broken. Simply separated by feet and yards of space.

VI

SOME ten miles farther on they came to the first of the forts, a great, towering structure of rocks piled together across the road. It was a parapet sixty feet high, enclosing a square of space. In sheltered places among the rocks there was a vast amount of soot as if flames had burned here fiercely. But there was no charcoal. Here, too, were innumerable bones. There would have been thousands of skeletons in this walled area if they had been put together. But they were separate. Every bone, no matter how small, had been completely separated from every other bone.

They could be identified, however. These were the bones of people like those who once had owned this golden-metal vehicle. They had died here by thousands. Weapons, bent and ruined, proved that they had died fighting. After death, each body had

been exhaustively disjoined and the separate bones scattered utterly without system. And the victors had apparently done nothing else.

Borden knitted his brows as the ground car went on, having perilously skirted around the walls. Jerry seemed to feel that he had wasted time looking. He tried a higher rate of speed. The car yielded it without effort. There seemed to be no limit to the speed at which these remarkable vehicles could travel without vibration or swaying or jolting.

That first fort was perhaps fifty miles behind when Borden's expression changed from harried bewilderment to shock. He stared ahead as the vehicle sped along the geometrically linear highway, wind-swept and free of dust as it was.

He said slowly, "That's right, Jerry. Make as much speed as you can. When you're tired, I'll drive. We've got to catch Sattell before he reaches that white spot. It's possible that more than our lives depend on it. . . ."

They did not catch Sattell, though they drove night and day. Their speed varied from fifteen miles an hour when they crawled over occasionally drifted sand dunes which swallowed the highway, to two hundred miles an hour or better. Borden estimated grimly that they averaged more than a thousand miles per twenty-hour day.

Sattell couldn't have kept that up, so they must have passed him, probably as he slept in some hiding place off a rocky spot in the highway where there would be no trail to guide them to him. But of course the wind might have erased his trail anywhere.

Ellen tried to rest or doze in the back while Jerry or Borden drove on, one resting while the other drove. But after the first day the actual overtaking of Sattell plainly was not Borden's purpose. It was clear that he meant to get ahead of Sattell, to reach the white spot first.

On the second day of their journeying they found a second fort. This also was a structure across the highway, defended from attack in the direction for which they were headed. It had been more carefully built than the other one. This had been more constructed of squared stones, lifted into position by construction engines whose sand-eroded carcasses were still in place.

There also were larger instruments of warfare here, worn away by centuries of exposure to blowing sand. The fort itself had many times been filled with sand and emptied again by the wind. Only under archways were there any signs of soot, as if flames had burned terribly here. Some land cruisers such as the one in which they rode had been destroyed like the one they had seen at the first fort—pulled apart.

Like the other fort this one had not been demolished after its capture. Not even the cranes and weapons had been seized. But the defenders had been completely dismembered. No two bones were ever attached to each other. Rarely had one been broken. None had been gnawed. Some were sand-worn, but each was complete and entirely separate.

And tens of thousands—not merely thousands—had died here. Their bones proved it.

ELLEN watched Borden's face as they drove through this fortress.

"Do you know what happened, Dee?" she asked.

"I think so," he said coldly.

"The white spot?" It looks as if they had been fighting something that came from there."

"They were," said Borden. "And I don't want Sattell to encounter the thing they were fighting. He knows too much."

She studied his expression. She knew that they were making the top possible speed toward that same white spot from which a heat-ray had been thrown at them. He hadn't explained. Jerry was too diffident to ask. Ellen was not, but something occurred to her suddenly.

"You said, the 'thing'!" she said, startled. "Not creatures or people or anything like that! You said the thing!"

He grimaced, but did not answer her. Instead, he said, "I'll take the tiller, Jerry. We've still got the talkie that Sattell sabotaged, haven't we?"

Jerry nodded and shifted the tiller to him. They'd discovered that the steering gear could be shifted from side to side of the front of the vehicle, so that it could be

driven from either the right or left side. On a planet without cities but with highways running thousands of miles to the polar ice-caps, long-distance driving would be the norm. Conveniences for that purpose would he logical. Drivers could relieve each other without difficulty.

"Look it over," commanded Borden. "The logical way to sabotage a talkie would be to throw its capacitances out of balance. No visible sign of damage, but I couldn't find a band it wasn't tuned to. See if that was the trick."

Jerry busied himself as Borden drove on. Here the highway wound through great hills, the color of iron rust and carved by wind and sand into incredibly grotesque shapes. A long trail of swirling dust arose behind the racing cruiser.

Borden said abruptly, "I've been thinking. Check me, will you two? First, I think the people who made this vehicle were much like us. The skeletons proved that. They had families and pets and they made cars like this to travel long distances on highways they'd built from pole to pole. This car uses normal electric power, and its power source is good! So they should have had radio frequency apparatus as well as power. But no radio frequency is being used on this planet. The race that built this car, then, has either changed its culture entirely, or been wiped out."

Jerry said blankly, "You mean, the people in the white spot—"

"Are not, and were not the race that built the roads and made this machine," said Borden. "In fact, we've passed two forts where people like us died by tens of thousands, fighting against something from the white spot. They had long-range weapons, but at the end they were fighting with fire. You saw the soot! It was as if they burned oil by thousands of gallons to hold back something their long-range weapons couldn't stop. Fire is a short-range weapon, though a sun-mirror need not be. But nothing stopped this enemy. Vehicles like this were pulled right in half. That doesn't suggest people. It suggests a thing—something so gigantic and horribly strong that needle beams of flame couldn't stop it, and against which flame seemed a logical weapon to use. It must have been gigantic, because it could pull a land car apart endwise."

Ellen waited. Jerry knitted his brows. "I'm afraid," Jerry said, "I can't think of anything that would be big and . . . I just can't think what they could have been fighting."

"Think of what it wanted," Borden said drily. "It killed the population, wiped them out. Back on Earth, a long, long time ago, Ghenghis Khan led the Mongols to destroy Kharesmia. His soldiers looted the cities. They carried away all the wealth. They murdered the people. Plains were white with the skeletons of the folk they murdered. Do you notice a difference here?"

Jerry said irrelevantly, "You were right about the talkie, sir. Somebody's thrown it all out of tuning. I'll have to match it with the other to make use of it." Then he said painstakingly, "The difference between what you mentioned and the conquerors of the forts is that the loot was left in the forts. Engines and weapons and so on weren't bothered." Then he said in sudden surprise, "But the people weren't left as skeletons! They were all scattered!"

JERRY raised startled eyes from the talkie on which he was working. And suddenly he froze. Borden braked, stopped the car. They had come to a place where shattered ground cars were on the highway, on the sides of the road, everywhere. Here the road ran between monstrous steep-sided hills.

Borden started the car again and drove carefully around half of a vehicle which lay on the highway. Weapons had been mounted in it for shooting through the blister that was like the blister through which he looked in their car.

"There was a battle here, too," he said. "They fought with cars here. Maybe a delaying action to gain time to build the fort we just left. There are bones in these cars, too."

"But what were they fighting, Dee?" Ellen demanded again, uneasily.

Borden drove carefully past the scene of ancient battle—and defeat. He did not answer.

After a time Ellen said, more uneasily still, "Do you mean that whatever they fought against was—going to eat them?

It wanted their—bodies?"

"So far as we can tell," said Borden, "it took nothing else. Didn't even want their bones."

He drove on and on. He didn't elaborate. There was no need. A creature which consumed its victims without crushing them or biting them or destroying the structure of their bones! It must simply envelop them. Like an amoeba. A creature which discarded the inedible parts of its prey in separate fragments, without order of position, without selection. That also must be like an amoeba which simply extrudes inedibles through its skin. Ellen swallowed suddenly and her eyes looked haunted.

"Something like a living jelly, Dee," she said slowly. "It would flow along a highway. If you shot it with a needle-ray, it wouldn't stop because it would use the burned parts of its own body as food. You'd think of burning oil as a way to fight it. You'd try to make forts it couldn't climb over. Where would such a thing come from, Dee?"

BORDEN said drily, "From space. Maybe as a spore of its own deadly race. Or it might be intelligent enough for space-travel. It should be! It knew enough to make a sun-mirror of itself to destroy us! It also knew enough to make itself into straining cables to pull ground cars like this apart to get at the people inside."

Ellen shuddered. "But that must be wrong, Dee! A creature like that would cover a whole planet! It would consume every living thing and become itself the planet's surface or its skin."

"But this planet is mostly desert," Borden reminded her. "It may be that there was just one oasis on which a civilization started. Sun-power was all it had. It would make use of that. It would find the ice-caps at its poles, and build highways to them to haul water to extend itself. Its people would delight in such strangeness as running streams, like the one we saw. If something hellish came out of space, landed, and attacked that oasis, the thing would follow the survivors of its first attacks along the highways by which they retreated. When they built forts, they would congregate in numbers it could not resist attacking. And—"

Jerry glanced up. His face was white, and he looked sick.

"I recall, sir," he murmured, "that you said Sattell knew too much. I believe you guess the 'thing' you are talking about absorbed the knowledge of the people it consumed. Is that right? And if it should absorb more from Sattell, and through him know about us—"

"My guess," said Borden, "is that it knew we were in a space-ship. In one there are always relays working, machines running, things happening—as is always the case where there are humans. Where there are living beings. Such happenings can be detected. I also believe this 'thing' can tell when it can reach the living, and when it can't. When it can reach them, it undoubtedly moves to devour them. When it can't, it tries to destroy them—as it tried with us. That may be because of its own intelligence, or it may be because of the knowledge gained through what it has consumed.

"That's why I don't intend to let Sattell be consumed by it! He knows how the *Danaë's* drive works and how it should be repaired. He knows how to read the log and the maps he stole. Just as a precaution, I'm not going to let that 'thing' in the white spot gain the knowledge that there is a planet called Earth with life all over it, on every continent, and in the deeps of the seas. *If* the 'thing' in the white spot were to find out that there is such a place, and *if* it is intelligent enough to wipe out a civilized race on this planet, it might be tempted to take to space again. Or at least to send, say, part of itself!"

VII

ABRUPTLY the wind-carved, rust-colored hills came to an end. The highway curved slightly and reached out toward the horizon. But the horizon was not, now, a mere unending expanse of dunes and desert.

A bare few miles distant, the desert was white. There were no dunes. A vast, vast flat mass of nothing-in-particular, not even raising the level of the ground, reached away and away to this world's edge. It looked remarkably like a space on which a light snowfall had descended, shining in the sunlight until melting should come. The

towers of the city in the midst of it also were shimmering white.

But it all was not a completely quiescent whiteness. There were ripplings in it. A pinnacle rose abruptly, and Borden backed the vehicle fiercely as the pinnacle formed a cuplike end of gigantic size, and the interior of that cup turned silvery.

The rust-colored hills blotted out just as a beam of purest flame licked from it to the spot where the ground car had been the moment before. Rocks split and crackled in the heat.

The beam faded. The light vanished.

"So," said Borden matter-of-factly, continuing what he had been saying, as if there had been no interruption, "as long as Sattell is at large, why, we have to kill that 'thing.' I think I know how to do it. With a little overload, I believe that walkie-talkie will do the trick. You see, the 'thing' is terrifically vulnerable, now. It has conquered this planet. It was irresistible. Nothing could stand against it. So it will be easy to kill."

But in that opinion, Borden was mistaken. Living creatures moving toward the white spot should have had no reason to be suspicious. Traveling at high speed along the highway, they should have continued at high speed to the very border of the white spot, at least. More probably they should have entered the white-covered area filled with a mild curiosity as to what made it so white. And of course the white spot—the horror, the protaean protoplasm of which it was composed—would have engulfed them. But the car stopped. And the white spot *was* intelligent.

TWENTY minutes after the first crackling impact of a heat beam in the valley, Borden was out of the ground car and moving carefully to peer around a rocky column at the white spot.

Its appearance had changed. There was a rise in the ground level at the edge of the white spot now. The stuff which was the creature itself—which Ellen had aptly called a living jelly—had flowed from other places to form a hillock there. Borden regarded it with suspicion. Obviously, it could send out pseudopods. Amoebae can do that, and he had just seen this thing form a sun-ray projector of itself.

But Borden was not aware of the possibilities of a really protaean substance to take any form it desires.

He saw the pseudopod start out. He was astounded. It did not thrust out. The hillock, the raised-up ground level, suddenly sped out along the highway with an incredible swiftness. He regarded it with a shock that was almost paralyzing.

But not quite. He fled to the car, leaped into it, and sent it racing down the highway at the topmost speed he could coax from it. His face was gray and sweating. His hands shook.

Ellen gasped, "What, Dee? What's happened?"

"The beast," said Borden in an icy voice. "It's after us."

Ellen stared back. And she saw the tip-end of the white-spot's pseudopod as it came racing into the end of the valley through which the highway ran. It was a fifty-foot, shapeless blob of glistening, translucent horror. And it did not thrust out from the parent body. It laid down a carpet of its own substance over which its fifty-foot mass slid swiftly.

An exact, if unimpressive, analogy would be a cake of wet soap, or a mass of grease, sliding over a space it lubricated with its own substance as it flowed, leaving a contact with its starting point as a thin film behind. Or it could be likened to a roll of carpet, speeding forward as it unrolled.

A hillock of glistening jelly, the height of a five-story building, plunged into the valley at forty miles an hour or better. By sheer momentum it flowed up the mountainside, curved, and came sliding back to the highway and on again after the ground car.

But the car was in retreat at over a hundred miles an hour. It reached a hundred and fifty miles an hour. Two hundred.

Borden stopped it five miles down the highway and wiped his forehead.

"Now," he said grimly, "I see why ordinary weapons didn't work against it. The thing is protean, not amoeboid. It isn't only senseless jelly. It has brains!"

He considered, frowning darkly. Then he turned the ground car off the road. He drove it around a dune, and another. It became suddenly possible to see across the

desert toward the white mass at the horizon.

THERE was a ribbon, a road, a highway of whiteness leading toward the city. The five-story-high mass of stuff that had come sweeping toward the car had traveled along the highway, carpeting the rocky surface with its own substance. Now there were new masses of loathesome whiteness surging along the living road. There were hillows, surgings, undulations. It was building up for a fresh and irresistible surge.

Across the desert a new pseudopod, a new extension of the white organism, moved with purposeful swiftness. It was somehow like a narrow line of whitecaps moving impossibly over aridness.

"It knows we stopped," Borden said. "It won't attack. It'll act as if baffled—until there's a fresh mass of it behind us. Then it will drive together and catch us in between. Jerry, are you set to try the talkie stuff?"

"Pretty well," sighed Jerry.

The car crawled back to the highway. The waiting mass of jellylike monster was larger. It grew larger every instant, as fresh waves of its protaean substance arrived through the throbbing of the pseudopod back to the oasis.

"Turn on the walkie-talkie," commanded Borden.

Jerry, white and shaken, threw the switch. An invisible beam of micro-waves sped down the valley behind the halted car. It reached the blob of jelly which now was as large as when it had started from the parent mass. The jelly quivered violently. Then it was still.

"Turn it off," ordered Borden. "Why didn't that work?"

Jerry turned off the micro-wave beam. The jelly quivered once more. Borden, watching with keen eyes, said:

"On again."

The pile of jelly quivered a third time, but less violently. The first impact of the micro-wave beam had bothered it, but it had been able to adjust almost instantly. It perceived the micro-waves. That much was certain. But it could adjust to them.

Borden said furiously, "The damned thing can learn! It can think. It is smart as the devil! But if I am right, what it wants more than anything else is not to do anything. It has to be awake when we are near. It can't help itself, but it wants to sleep. We and our micro-waves are like mosquitos buzzing around a man's head. I thought they—"

He stopped short, but after a moment laughed unpleasantly.

"I get it. When it learns a pattern it can disregard it. Living things always act without pattern. So it can't disregard them. But it could disregard an unmodulated beam. Let's see what a modulated one will do. Jerry, the microphone."

When the talkie went on and its beam of micro-waves hit the monstrous, featureless thing, it did not even quiver. Then Borden said into the microphone:

"'Mary had a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went—'."

The monstrous mass of ghastly jelly plunged toward him.

Ellen shot the ground car away. Borden's throat contracted. When his voice stopped, the frenzied movement of the horror ceased. It stood trembling in a gigantic, glistening heap. It seemed to wait. Borden considered grimly.

"It could make a sun-mirror now," he decided, "but not a very big one. We'd run away. It doesn't want to chase us away until that other arm of stuff gets behind us. If we run, it will follow. It could follow the original inhabitants of this planet for thousands of miles. Doubtless it would follow us as far.

"And there's always Sattell. We've got to kill it. How? I thought a walkie-talkie beam would irritate it. It can adjust to it. Then I thought a modulated wave—voice-modulated—would exhaust it. But no. We need something new, right now!"

THERE was silence. Then Ellen said uneasily:

"Maybe this idea isn't sensible, but could it be that the walkie-talkie beam just wasn't strong enough? It was too much like—like tickling it, arousing its appetite. Maybe if the beam were powerful enough it would be like paralysis."

Borden did not even answer. He hauled at the objects that had been found to be

the covers to the power-leads of the vehicle. He and Jerry worked feverishly, without words. Then Borden stood up.

"This time we are really risking everything," he said grimly. "The full power of the car's power source goes into the beam. If a walkie-talkie beam was appetizing, this ought to curl its hair. Switch, Jerry! Microphone on!"

VIII

SOME hundreds of kilowatts of power in modulated-wave form would go out now into the body of a creature whose normal sensory reception centers would be accustomed to handling minute fractions of one watt. The talkie could handle the power, of course. With cold-emission oscillators, there was no danger of burning out a wave-generating unit.

"'—the lamb was sure to go,'" said Borden.

The two-mile distant mass of horrid jelly began to quiver uncontrollably. But without any purpose at all. Borden said with a terrible satisfaction:

"'It followed her to school one day, which was against the rule. It made the children laugh and play to see the lamb at school.'"

The shapeless mass of living stuff made tortured upheavals. It flung up spires of glistening stuff. It writhed. It contorted. It flung itself crazily against the hillsides.

"'Twas brillig,'" said Borden, "'and the slithy toves, did gyre and gymbal in the wabe. All mimsy were the borogroves, and the mome raths outgrabe.'"

The jelly fled. It flowed back upon the carpet of its own substance on which it had been able to move with such ghastly speed. It flowed down from a mound to a flattened thickening of the pseudopod which had thrown itself at the car.

That pseudopod flowed away upon itself. It fled. It raced frantically to be gone from a beam of micro-waves whose pattern was not fixed, which varied unpredictably from instant to instant as sound waves changed it from something the white-spot being could disregard to something which did not promise food, and which could not be ignored.

The white-spot creature was tormented. Its instincts said that what was not patterned was life. Its intelligence said that this was not life—not life in quantity proportional to the stimulus, it yielded, anyhow. The modulated micro-waves impressed its consciousness as a steam whistle at his ear impresses a man. The sensation was intolerable. It was maddening.

In less than an hour, Borden had returned to the end of the valley and was beaming micro-waves at the white spot across the few miles of desert in between. He was beginning to be weary now, and his memory for recitative verse was running thin.

"Take over and keep talking, Ellen," he said into the microphone. He handed it to her.

Ellen said steadily, "I don't know how this is doing what it does, but—'My name is John Wellington Wells, I'm a dealer in magic and spells, in hexes and curses and ever-filled purses and witches and crickets and elves.' I've got this wrong somehow, Dee, but tell me what it is and I'll try to keep on."

Borden said, "I'd rather not tell you. It would overhear. I think, though, that it's moving away. The white stuff is drawing back!"

And it was true. The whiteness which had been beyond the desert was withdrawing. The pseudopod—a misnomer, because in this case the word should have been something else—the extension which had come to destroy the humans had long since withdrawn. The formless ground-covering was gathering itself into a mass, and that mass was moving away.

There was a dark space visible. It was ground—humus, oasis soil—which had been covered by the unspeakable organism which centuries since had conquered this planet.

"I'd chase it," Borden said somberly, "only I'm not sure it couldn't get itself together and make a sun-mirror. We'll wait till nightfall."

"But what are we doing to it?" demanded Ellen.

JERRY was at the microphone now, going through the *Sonnets From the Portugese,* while the living jelly at the edge of the world quivered and fled in shaking revulsion.

"The thing's alive," said Borden. "And it can't help receiving all sorts of impressions. Like any other organism, it learns to disregard any impression it receives that it can anticipate or classify. We don't hear a clock ticking. If we live near a noisy street, we don't hear traffic. But we wake if a door squeaks. That—white spot can disregard the electric waves of lightning. It can disregard sunshine. But it can't disregard things it can't fit into a pattern. It has to pay attention. And I'm giving it the kind of unpatterned signals that normally mean living things. Continuous, nonrepeat patterns of stimulation. And—they're too strong for the devilish thing."

Ellen said doubtfully, "Too strong?"

"You touch people to call their attention. If you touch them too hard, it isn't a touch but a blow, and you can knock them down. That's what I'm giving this thing. It has the quality of a signal the spot can't ignore, and the force of a blow. It should have the psychological effect of thousands of bells of intolerable volume—only worse. But we've got to keep on with the stimulus. And we mustn't repeat, or it might be able to get used to the pattern."

"I'll talk to it in French," said Ellen. "But it doesn't seem to me that a walkie-talkie could be too strong for—"

"It's hooked to the car's power system," Borden told her. "Jerry set it up and connected it just before he began to recite poetry. There are several kilowatts of radiation going to the thing now, and all of it is attention-holding radiation."

When night fell and the use of a sun-mirror was patently impossible, Borden moved on the highway toward what had been the white spot. The walkie-talkie sent on its waves ahead.

Ellen recited, "*La fourmi et la cigale*" from second-year French. Borden was more or less ready to take on from there with what he remembered of Shakespeare.

They reached the end of the desert and all about them there was the moist ground of the oasis which once had been the center of a civilization. Presently they moved into the deserted, emptied buildings of a city.

Borden said, "This civilization will be worth studying!"

They went on and on and on, talking endlessly, and driving the entity which had conquered a planet by painstakingly recalled sections of Mother Goose, and by haphazard recollections of ancient history, the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome, and the care and feeding of domestic cats.

When dawn came, Borden was speaking rather hoarsely into the microphone, and the creature was plainly in sight before them. It writhed and struggled spasmodically. It flung masses of itself insanely about. It knitted itself into intricate spires and pinnacles, with far-flung bridges, which shuddered and dissolved.

THE SUN rose, and the thing should have been able to destroy them. But it could not. It still writhed. It still shuddered. It twisted in monstrous, weary, lunatic gyrations. Ellen regarded it with eyes of loathing.

"It acts like it's gone mad," she said in revulsion.

"It may have," said Borden. "It's certainly exhausted. But we're getting pretty tired, too." He said into the microphone. "You probably don't understand this that I'm saying, any more then you understand any of the rest. But you had this coming to you."

He handed the microphone to Jerry, who had suddenly remembered an oration, *Spartacus to the Gladiators*. Jerry began to recite it.

But the writhings of the mountainous mass of jelly became more terribly weary, more quiveringly effortful. There came a time when it quivered only very, very faintly. Those quiverings ceased.

"I think it's dead, sir," said Jerry.

Borden snapped off the walkie-talkie. He snapped it on again. The horrible, half-cubic-mile of jelly did not flinch.

Borden said drily, "Abracadabra, hocus pocus, e pluribus unum."

There was no sign of life in the thing. He watched grimly for any sign of returning activity. By noon, though, it could be seen that the ghastly mass of once-living substance was changing. It was liquefying. There were rills of an unpleasant fluid forming on its glossy flanks, to run down and flow and flow away into the desert to be dried up.

"I don't think we'll want to be around for the next few weeks," Borden said heavily. "We'll go back and fix up the ship."

Then Ellen mentioned Sattell's name for the first time in days.

"How about Sattell?"

"We outran him on the way here," Borden said moodily. "But I think he'll come on. He'll want to find out if we're dead. Not knowing what the thing—the white spot—was, I think he'll figure that either we'll be sent back with help, or killed. If he gets to where he can see the white spot, and we haven't started back with friends, he'll be sure we're dead. Then he'll go back and start to fix up the ship himself. I think we'll meet him on the way."

And they did. The second day out from what was now an oasis instead of a white spot, they saw Sattell's car headed in their direction as a moving gleam of golden reflected sunlight.

Jerry ran their car off the road to a hiding-place behind a dune. He and Borden took posts behind the sand dune's tip. Sattell came racing at a hundred and fifty miles an hour, raising a long plume of sand dust behind him.

Borden and Jerry fired together—two thin pencil rods of flame from the golden-metal weapons. Sattell's ground car ran past them, crossing the highway just a foot from the rock. The treads of the car disintegrated. The car sped on, slid, and rolled clumsily, three separate times. Then it stopped.

The oval side window turned and Sattell came crawling out. He had a golden-metal weapon now. He must have searched feverishly in the shambles of one of the two forts to find a weapon that still would operate. He swung it frenziedly in their direction. He ran toward them, screaming hate. He stumbled.

His weapon was firing, but the fire was short. He fell on it. Into its flame.

And the ship's log and the star maps were in the ground car Borden and Jerry had disabled.

IT WAS more than a month later when the *Danaë*, completely overhauled and refueled, and with the product of Ellen's agriculture stored carefully away, hovered cautiously over what had been the white spot. At last they descended into the central square of the city that once had been the center of a civilization.

The three of them spent a day examining that city. They found things they could not understand, and things at which they smiled, and things that were quite marvelous. Every civilization makes some discoveries that others miss, and misses some that others take for granted. There would be useful items in this civilization, when humans landed here and examined the remains.

"I think," Ellen said, to Borden, "that you mean to come back."

Borden nodded, frowning a little.

"No rational natives," he said, "and eighteen thousand square miles of oasis. It would make a rather wonderful place in which to live—with that city and that civilization to study. Will you mind?"

Ellen laughed. She held out her hand. There were capsules in it.

"I've been planting more seeds," she said, "so there'll be Earth-type vegetation here when we get back."

"And Jerry?"

Jerry said bashfully, "There's a girl . . . If I can organize a group to make a settlement here, I think I'll be back."

"Then we'll be back," said Borden. "And next time we'll bring some of our furry friends down from the ice-cap and really find out what it means to settle down and live here."

And then the *Danaë* climbed for the stars and started back home.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

LAZARUS

***A Powerful New Story by* MARGARET ST. CLAIR**

Illustration by
VIRGIL FINLAY

Touch the SKY

By ALFRED COPPEL

The infinite may be beautiful, but it has its limits. . . .

THE SIGN said: RIDE THE ROCKET! TWICE AROUND THE UNIVERSE FOR 25¢! Which was cheap enough, Pete Moore thought. Cheap enough at twice the fare.

Glory giggled and pulled at his arm. "Let's ride, Pete. Let's see what you're in for."

He smiled down at her thinly, because it wasn't really anything for her to giggle about, but that was Glory for you. She was young enough, gay enough, to be able to make a joke of it, and that was good and he shouldn't spoil it. Not many other wives would feel like that. Not many other wives would want to spend his last night home on

the midway, for that matter. But then again, that was Glory.

He listened to the tinny carousel music and the babble of the crowd, the laughter and the mingled drone of barkers. He smelled the tang of roasting popcorn and the hot-doggy stink of the lunchcounters. He looked at the ferris wheel and the crazy swoop of lights that was the scenic railway and the people crowding along the boardwalk with kewpie dolls and spun-sugar candy cones in their hands.

Question! his mind demanded: Is this reality?

Answer: Of course. What else?

I've been too long away from cities, he thought. Too many silent nights in the desert, too many high flights in cold blue air. Too long away from Glory?

He felt guilty and depressed at the thought. It wasn't the way for a man to feel. Not before the great adventure. Still, he couldn't avoid an almost homesick longing for the deep darkness of the desert and the silver ship waiting there.

Soon, he thought. Three days; three days and a few hours.

He felt a tug at his arm.

"Pete!" Glory was smiling up at him, half-aggrieved, half-loving. He looked again at the garishly painted sign.

RIDE THE ROCKET!

"Let's ride it, Pete," Glory said. "Let's!"

There was something in her smile that touched him. Pride? That, and love and youth. To her, he was *the* man. For her, and for all the world. The one who was going to reach out beyond the far horizon and touch the sky and bring back a pot of gold for everyone.

She thinks no one else could do it, he told himself. That's love. There were a dozen qualified men, and yet—

The moonshot was his.

RIDE THE ROCKET!

"All right, baby," he said.

As he paid their fare for the rocket-ride, Pete found himself looking at the girl in the booth. Tired eyes and stringy hennaed hair. No dreams there. He had an impulse to tell her that soon he'd really be riding the rocket and that from then on things would be different.

New frontiers and new dreams for everybody. Up and up.

THE GIRL'S eyes met his, and it was Pete who looked away. You don't talk frontiers to pale, worn faces and eyes bleached of color by tinny music and stinks and men.

They walked up a wooden ramp to where a little metal bullet on rails waited. The paint, once bright, was all scuffy. A sour-faced attendant in grayish coveralls stood by a large lever.

"Fasten ya seat belts, Mac"

"We're off to the sky," Glory said.

Somewhere old machinery wheezed.

The little bullet began to move along the rails toward a hinged trap-door in a wall painted to look like clouds.

"Hold my hand, Pete," Glory said breathlessly.

Glory, Glory, he thought. Young and simple and in love with life. Any kind of life. Real or unreal. Glory with a bubbling laughter, a zest, a faith. Maybe it was really for her that he was taking the big flight. If only he could bring back the pot of gold. If only he could tell weary Man that the sky was all his. He thought of the strained, unhappy faces in the streets, the fear-filled eyes. If he could return and say to them: "Here's your new frontier!" Yes, by God, it was worth the work, and the risk. Glory was right. It was something to be proud of.

I'm going to the moon!

Me, Pete Moore, to the *moon!*

"There it is, Pete!"

They had bumped through the painted door into a musty semi-darkness. The walls were perforated with holes for stars, and from somewhere below a huge yellowish moon was rising.

Off a short way to the right was a glowing papier-mâché globe painted with broad bands slightly askew, and behind that was another with rings.

A loudspeaker whistled tinnily and overhead, on wire runners, an electric globe crossed the dim chamber, pieces of yellow and white crepe paper fluttering feebly behind.

"Oh, Pete! A comet?"

"Sure enough, Glory," he said.

The rumbling little bullet skirted the walls and Pete could see the electric lights behind the holes. Stars, he thought sardonically. Close enough to touch. Lucky us.

"There's Mars, Pete," Glory said,

squeezing his hand.

I'm getting disenchanted, he thought.

A red ball, all painted with canals and white polar caps far too big.

They should have had a technical advisor on this project, he thought. Paging Palomar.

The bullet began its second circuit of the papier-mâché universe, and the moon was high now, projected on the wall by some kind of lantern-slide lamp. There was a face on the moon.

It began then—just a tiny bead of fear way down inside his belly. But it grew. He felt suffocated, claustrophobic, oppressed by fakery and cheapness.

Glory was laughing with delight. "Oh, it's wonderful!"

Shut up! Pete thought savagely. Shut up, *shut up!*

With an effort, he got hold of himself.

I've been working too hard. I'm jittery thinking about the moonshot, and all this seedy burlesque just irritates me. There's nothing to get heated up about. Calm down.

But why am I suddenly afraid?

He looked again at the ridiculous moon with its smirking face. He saw that plaster had fallen from the wall in places, peeling away, leaving the bare hexagons of wire and laths.

My God, he thought. A chickenwire sky.

He thought again of the girl in the ticket booth, and of the tired, frightened people all laughing too much and shoving and running outside.

The bullet started down at last, toward the hinged door. On this side it was painted to look like Earth, with a distorted map of North America. All wrong, somehow.

Pete felt ill. It was as though someone were making ill-tempered fun of the dreams and the tall silver ship waiting out on the desert. Cheapening it. Laughing nastily.

The little bullet bumped through the seedy, scruffy Earth and out into the night of the midway, out into the crowd-sounds and music and hot-doggy smells.

"It was fun, Pete," Glory said.

He helped her out onto the rickety platform. He had the insane notion that the girl in the ticket booth and the lounging attendant were laughing at him.

"It sure was, honey," he said wearily, still feeling the illogical fear of he-knew-not-what inside himself. "Real fun."

Glory looked up at him, eyes alight and almost feverishly gay. "I did what you are going to do. I touched the sky!"

NEW FRONTIERS. New lands in the sky. New hope.

It was quiet. The jet was still and no sound was anywhere in the ship. Now a soft tick from the timer. A whisper from the questing radarscope. And again, the stillness.

We've done it, Pete thought. We've really done it. The hard part is over.

Ride the rocket!

He remembered the pain of the takeoff and the absolute panic that had welled up in him when the irrevocability of his action came home. He remembered riding a tail of red fire up out of the hot desert air of New Mexico into the still blue, and then the silence and the almost unnerving thrill of the realization that the moonshot was going to succeed.

The radio hissed at him with the voice of the desert base half around the world.

"Hello moonshot. This is Base. All's okay. Stage one landed in the Gulf. Stage two just reported floating off the Azores. Good show."

Pete lifted himself from the acceleration couch and felt a moment of nausea and panic as he floated toward the ceiling of the tiny cell. Free flight. He steadied himself and checked the flow of telemetered information binding the ship to the glowing curve far below. All okay. Except that—

Except that you're still afraid, he told himself. Not just the normal fear-of-falling-afraid that the psychs told you about. Afraid like before—in that silly damn carnival ride thing.

Afraid of the dark?

No, not quite that. More a closed in, cheated feeling.

Premonition? Nonsense.

He clung to the radarscope, trembling. With every rushing mile upward, outward, his fear was growing. It wasn't right, it didn't make sense. But he felt as though he were rushing straight at a brick wall, head down, eyes closed.

He lit the telescreens.

The stars look funny, he thought uneasily.

The timer ticked. The radar whispered, searching. Time passed and his fear grew

thicker, less reasonable.

His fingers dug hard at the metal of the instrument panel as the night slipped by outside the hull. The ship's orbital elipse, Kepler's contribution to the new frontier, was established.

Pete thought, something's wrong. Very wrong. The stars look queer.

The constellations in the telescreens were distorting, and there was something ahead of the ship where there should be nothing but emptiness. It showed in the screen for just an instant and was lost. A ringed sphere.

I must be dreaming, Pete thought. But then, what is reality? That sphere was Saturn. And it was a hundred yards across.

Reality? *Insanity!*

I'd better check with Base, Pete thought, and tell them I've gone off my rocker, that I'm suffering hallucinations.

But he did nothing except cling shaking to the panel, watching the distorted stars in the screen. They were blurring now, streaks of light that seemed to be very close to the ship.

AND THEN came the moon. It came and went very quickly, pocked and scarred and with only one face. And *small.* Very small and very close.

Pete felt closed in, suffocated. The radar alarm was screaming at him that something was near, too near.

He clamped down savagely on himself. There was an explanation somewhere. He had to find it! He had to think!

Item. The stars. Distorted. Blurred.

Item. Saturn. A hundred yards across.

Item. A tiny replica of the moon, like a pimple on the inside of an egg.

Replica? No. *The* moon. The only moon. Reality.

Hypothesis. Say that space is not as men imagined it. Say that it is an illusion, without lightyears, without great suns, without huge planets. Say for the sake of argument that it is a shell with holes in it, and light outside, and the Sun itself an illusion of heat and power, and—

Say that this hollow shell is man's new frontier; a fraud, a toy for things outside—

The alarm screamed at him. The ship was plunging toward the blurry light of the stars.

With an icy hand on his heart, Pete Moore turned to look at the telescreen behind him. A misty blue ball swam in musty darkness. The oceans gleamed in the light of the sun, cloud masses whitened it, the wrinkled face of the land looked unreal—

He began to laugh. Tears streaked his cheeks as he pounded his bloody fists against the instrument panel in time to the clanging of the alarm.

The Earth, the Earth—

It *did* rather look like papier-mâché.

He touched the sky.

NON-BURSTING BUBBLES

THE walls of your house in the future will be foamed into place rather than hammered and nailed. Raymond F. Boyer, director of the physical research laboratory of the Dow Chemical Company of Midland, Michigan, recently outlined the projected system of construction. He pictured a device, the plastic equivalent of a concrete mixer, that would generate plastic foam, of any color desired, and force it through a hose to a workman who would handle the nozzle. Using only rudimentary forms (or molds) to contain the plastic until it jelled, the workman could build up the wall quickly. Then an engineer would focus the radiation of a high-voltage X-ray machine, or radioactive cobalt 60, on the wall to raise its structural strength by cross-linking the plastic molecules.

Not bad, eh? Bright, cheap, quickly-constructed homes; the answer to our long-standing housing problem. And there are other advantages. Plastic made in such single-unit sections can be handled much more imaginatively than multi-unit sections such as brick walls, frame-wood walls, etc. James W. Fitzgibbon, executive vice-president of Geodesics, Inc., of Raleigh, N.C., showed how geometric forms can be linked in such a way so as to create a roof made of *petals*—plastic sections that unfold like a daisy bud if the homeowner wishes to take advantage of a fine summer day's sunshine!

Inexpensive, modern, beautiful housing that converts to the great outdoors with a push of a button—what more could we ask for? Well, Dr. Johan A. Bjorksten, president of Bjorksten Research Laboratories, Madison, Wisconsin, described a house his company is building which will be 95% *underground.* Properly used plastic shields will keep the rooms from becoming dank, large picture windows jutting through the hillside will admit plenty of light, and (this is the big advantage) it will have excellent resistance to atomic shock waves. So we're all set. Every advantage of gracious living, and we'll have a chance to survive the Hell-bomb!

—Herbert D. Kastle

Illustration by
PETER POULTON

The 13TH JUROR

By LESLIE WALTHAM

From a ship in space he spied on his wife—and saw her in the arms of another man. . . .

EXCERPT taken from "THE HISTORY OF TRIAL PROCEDURE, 2175 TO 2543, A.D." written by Prof. A. I. Schule, S.E.D.:

"Even then, in the beginning of the twenty-third century, crime per se, itself had ceased to exist. The lower emotions had already been bred out of the people. Envy, hate, avarice and kindred

responses were virtually non-existent. Every citizen had a crude type of emotiograph attached to his person, which was examined periodically by the Eye. If any deviation from the norm was observed, the accused was called up for questioning.

"In the absence of actual crime, any emotion which might have precipitated crime was considered unlawful, and men were tried for too much anger, or too little pity. The only purpose of a trial was to ascertain whether sufficient provocation could be established to warrant a given reaction. If the cause, or the incident, justified the emotional response, the defendant was exculpated.

"Trial procedure was extremely simple. The use of the witness was obsolete. Above the defendant's box was a concentric screen upon which his thoughts could be projected. The Questioner would channel the thoughts of the accused into whatever date periods were pertinent, and in that way, the defendant reviewed his own case.

"It is into this category that the celebrated, and very controversial, John Hastings case falls. You all remember that, of course, as the 'cause célèbre' of the year 2375 A.D."

No. Amer. Sec., Book Two, p. 675.

ONE night they watched a column of flame lift a silver speck into the sky. And one night, much later, they heard a voice call into space, saying, "Come back, John Hastings, come back.

"Our inspection has shown serious deviations in your emotiograph. You will turn your rocket and rechart for Earth, John Hastings. For trial, John Hastings."

And they came to the trial. Out of the ripe, wet hills, down from the blistering dome over the city, up through the shafts of the gritty Substructure. They came and stood in lines, wiping the August sweat from their eyes, littering the levels with orange peels as they ate. Women, with babies strapped to their shoulders, and suppers left unradiated on the cooker. Men, with lead-shielded faces, and tools laid aside in the middle of a movement. But they came, and stood and jostled one another, milling and gossiping:

"Gonna be some trial!"

". . . might even resort to electrocution. . . . ."

"Naw, that's dark time methods."

"Oh yeah?"

Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. . . .

But they felt good, the people, for it wasn't their trial. The words could come easy and undammed, for it was John Hastings who was on trial. They could look at him all they wanted to, and talk.

And then, suddenly, they could look at me too. Because I was called as the thirteenth juror on the John Hastings trial.

I WALKED into it after a night that held no sleep. And looked at it. The yawning amphitheatre where humanity poured. And saw it. The thirteen chairs raised high in the center. And heard it. The crowd's susurrus gentling under insistent reminders from a bodiless Questioner.

I glanced at the faces in the other twelve boxes, recognizing some of them. Angus Vortler, the psychosurgeon. William Bax, head of Intergalactic, a bleak, wintery man who doodled constantly. Dollar signs, probably. Fred Kitson, of the horny palms, chief mechanic on the *Darkness*. All men who, because they had once reached out and touched hands with John Hastings, were now called to judge him. Several of them nodded to me as I took my place.

Wait.

They brought him in. I remembered the first time I had ever seen him, in the classroom. Eager and tall . . . tall and eager. Lord, what changed him? Something had taken the straightness from his shoulders, the sureness from his stride. There were furrows on his face where the tears had already been.

He stood silently in the box where they had put him. A box just big enough for his bulky body, and maybe a little of the misery he carried with him.

A voice spoke.

"This, John Hastings, is your trial. You stand before this Court of Truth-Probity, accused of registering the emo-

tion of hate. A hatred so violent, that had we permitted you to carry out your anticipated actions, it would have resulted in the murder of one Mary Hastings, your wife. Do you understand the charge?"

"I do." He didn't know what to do with his hands.

"How do you plead?"

"I plead not guilty."

"On what ground?" asked the voice.

The defendant raised his head. "On the ground that I had good and sufficient reason to justify my emotion."

"The reactographs on your wife, Mary Hastings, have been thoroughly examined, and it has been determined that she performed no act which in any way deviated from the norm. Had any disturbances taken place within Mary Hastings during the week of last March ninth to sixteenth, it would have shown up plainly in a flux on the charts. Your contention is impossible."

The man in the box bit his lip. "Nevertheless, I contend it. My wife gave me sufficient reason. She—she was unfaithful to me."

Only silence for a full minute.

"It is impossible."

"*But* true!" Hastings shouted.

The multitude leaned forward, a misted inquiry rustling its skirts.

"Very well," the voice almost sighed. "Will you submit, Captain Hastings, to the use of the concentric screen? We wish to know more of the circumstances surrounding several pertinent dates."

His face was the color of picked bones. "Yes, I will submit."

Two men advanced carrying a mesh complexity between them. Placing it over the defendant's head they allowed it to fall to his shoulders.

"Are you ready, John Hastings?"

"Yes." It seemed he was already gone from the place.

"Then concentrate. Remember. Permit your mind to have freedom." The voice washed over him in waves. "It is a day in December . . . the fourteenth . . . Take my words and let them carry you. . . ."

The screen above the defendant's head began to cloud and draw in.

"It is cold outside . . . the snow is falling. There is a warm room. A fire is burning. . . .

The mists opalesced and formed a nucleus.

"There is a pool of light on the desk, unexpected flowers in a bowl, the odor of duck, roasted brown. . . ."

Something was struggling for existence in the screen.

"There is a brown-haired woman—"

And the image was horn. . . .

SHE bent over a card. "Candlelight, best service for two, white wine, celebration atmosphere," she wrote and put it into the dining table selector. Somewhere an orchestra started playing Debussy.

"John," she called. "Almost ready."

A card shot back at her from the mirror as she passed. "Your nose is shiny," it read. She powdered quickly, taming wisps of hair as an afterthought.

"Any further comments?" she wanted to know, and held out her hand. A second card appeared. "I can't whistle."

Her laughter brimmed over, laced in delight. "John, dinner's ready."

She called into three rooms, empty rooms. Crossing to the terrace, she opened a door on the night. Snowflakes rode in on an icy draft.

"Well?"

"John! What are you doing out there? I can't even see you."

"That seems to be one of your habits recently."

She drew him inside, and leaned against the door, closing. "Is it going to be like that tonight?"

"Maybe." His face was steeped in cold.

"Please. Not the day before you go."

The white crystals on his hair melted into drops, and a sudden warmth strained all harshness from his voice. "No, you're right, Mary. Not the day before I go."

Pushing him toward the fire, Mary took his cloak. "Didn't you notice?"

"What?"

"The table, silly. It's 'Happy Homecoming' tonight!"

"Leavestaking, you mean."

"No, homecoming. It's not December.

It's August. You've just opened the front door and said, 'Mary, I'm home!' And all the time in between hasn't been. It never will be."

He smiled for the first time.

"Now that's better."

The woman handed John Hastings a goblet, plump with yellow liquid. "To August, dear," she said, and raised her glass. "To the moment your foot touches Earth again. And to the wine . . . warm and golden, like our life together."

"Let's eat," he said. "Let's not ask questions." He faltered in a lack of direction.

"Wait a minute."

"For what?"

"For the questions you can't ask." The gaiety was gone. It was real now. "I think it's time we swept out the corners."

John nodded, his face slack.

"You've been strange lately."

"Oh that!" he shrugged. "Let's say it's the getting ready . . . the heart plunge just before you jump into space."

"No." It was definite. "It's more than that. You've been a rocket man all your life. You don't get nervous any more."

His fingers twisted the glass. Something else twisted his voice. "There are things in it that might make a man nervous, Mary. Black winds. Burning worlds. Holes in space waiting for him. You think it might be that, Mary?"

"No."

"But this is Alpha Centauri. This is faster-than-light." He bowed. "This is when baby-God Hastings tests his brain child . . . when the electron lightscope goes to bat. You think it might be that, Mary?"

"Don't make nasty fun."

HER husband regarded her a long, serious moment. "No. You're right again." Leaning in to her, he spoke softly. "Did you know, Mary, that it isn't the big things that make a man nervous any more? Only the little things—"

"Say it!" she insisted. "Get it out. You'll feel better."

He hadn't moved. "Just the very little things. A supper unradiated. An empty wrap hanger. An unfilled chair. Emptiness where there should be something."

"Where has there been emptiness?" Mary was surprised.

"Between us."

"Oh darling . . . that just isn't so."

"Isn't it?" He took her hands. "Cards on the table, Mary. Right?"

"Right!"

"You've been going to meetings for the last month."

"It's my turn on the committee."

"You've been out late quite a bit."

"I can't leave till they check me out. . . ."

"There have been other people there."

She pulled her hands away and escaped to the other side of the room. "Lots of them."

"But there was *one* face in particular."

"Oh." There was a finality in it. "Who told you?"

"Does that matter?" His hand waved it aside. "Why didn't you tell me Charles Lathrop was on the committee with you?"

"Because I knew how you'd feel." Instantly, she was at his side. "Oh darling, don't you suppose I know what you think? You've never accepted the fact that when I married you, my feeling for him was over and done."

"Is that true?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Can't you understand? What I felt for him four or five years ago was that young thing everyone goes through."

"Young things grow. Great oaks. . . ."

"Not this one. When you came, it was over. Is over."

He shook his head, and passed his hand over his face. "God knows I want to believe that. You're my wife, Mary. I love every bit of you. But Lathrop keeps bobbing up."

The fire crackled like dry leaves, rouging the unhappy walls. "There are more questions?" she wanted to know.

"Yes."

"Ask them."

"Did you know he was going to be on the committee?"

"Of course not."

"Forgive me, Mary, but—but have

you spent any extra time with him?"

"Oh John! We *talk* at the meetings —'Hello—it's a roaring day—have you heard the latest about Ganymede?' "

"That's all?"

"I swear."

"You don't feel anything?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. He's a friend, a brother, a comfortable dog."

The stiffness went out of Hastings. He sank back breathing hard, as if he had been running too fast. "Mary, you don't know how good that hears. You just don't know!"

"Oh my darling!" She held his head in her arms, her mouth close to his ear. "Has it been this, all these months?"

The man nodded, laughing a little. "I just couldn't take the thought that maybe—"

"Hush, hush! Don't even say it any more. Drink the wine and remember what I said . . . 'To its warm glow, like our home together.' "

His hand reached out; and trembling slightly, the fingers grasped, and fumbled, and clutched at air. The glass shattered prettily, spilling its golden life on the unalterable stone throat of the hearth.

And they stood there, hands untouching. Watching the glistening fragments trap the last warm glow of the fire.

ENOUGH, enough," a voice said. "You will rechannel your thoughts, Captain Hastings. There is another day in time."

The screen misted, and the veils swirled.

"March eleventh . . . on a ship . . . a glazed splinter in blackness. . . ."

The curtains quivered.

"Men gather tight against the void . . . a clarinet wails . . . there is the smell of sweat. . . ."

Kitson and Holmes were doing a dance. They had their breechskins rolled over their knees, and four grapefruit tied to their fronts.

"Take it off . . . take it off . . . *take it off!*" The men rode a ground swell of tinny music. Rhythm stamped out in the pattern of magnetic boots fought with the sucking sound of beer cans. The air curled with smoke.

Above their heads a hatch opened, and the Captain's legs appeared, descending ladderwise. Abruptly, the melee subsided into leftover clarinet tones.

"Mr. Kitson."

Kitson brought himself to attention, his grapefruit swinging. "Sir?"

"I've been informed there was news from home." The men looked at one another.

"Only the broadcast from the Sector, sir. Nothing unusual."

"You took it down on the tapes?"

"Yes, sir."

"I should like to hear it." From one corner a reluctant shuffling replaced the lately dead downbeats. The reproducer scratched badly.

". . . at a banquet given for members of the committee. Prominent among the guests was Mrs. Mary A. Hastings, wife of Captain John Hastings who is making history in his FTL flight to Alpha Centauri. Captain Hastings will test his invention, the electron-lightscope, from our neighboring sun. It is reliably reported that the lightscope will revolutionize astral observation, in that it will replace the telescope, and will bring distant galaxies to within a few hundred feet of the earth.

"Mrs. Hastings, smartly gowned, was seated next to Co-ordinator Charles Lathrop, who had—"

Someone jostled into the machine. The groove was lost.

Hastings spoke slowly. "I'd like to hear the rest of it."

Kitson was carefully unrolling his breechskins.

"I'd like to hear the rest of it, I said."

"Yes, sir," someone murmured.

". . . was seated next to Charles Lathrop, who had escorted her to the banquet, in the absence of the Captain. They danced frequently to the strains of the Deimos Orchestra which was rocketed here for the pro—"

"That's enough," said Hastings, staring whitely.

The mechanic took two steps toward him. "Is something wrong, sir? You look ill."

"Not at all, Mr. Kitson, not at all." His eyes snapped back to the man in

front of him, astraddle a newborn idea. "I was merely considering Peeping Toms, Mr. Kitson."

"Beg pardon, Sir?"

"Peeping Toms. Never heard of them, have you?"

"No, sir. I don't think any of us have."

"What a pity. A most fascinating subject. Found in a twentieth century history of the minor vices."

"Yes, sir."

"You display no curiosity, Mr. Kitson." His eyebrows raised. "In this, you differ significantly from our Peeping Tom. *He* wanted to know a great many things, and he settled the whole matter with a pair of binoculars." His voice sounded like scraped stone. "Yes indeed —*a pair of binoculars.*"

"I'm afraid I wasn't subjected to that facet of knowledge indoctrination, sir." Kitson shrugged imperceptibly. When the captain got like this—his shoulders spoke for him.

Hastings had caught the movement, however. "You find my words uninstructive?"

"No, sir—I mean—"

"Very well." Something was growing big in the man. "Since you view your deficiencies so lightly, you may report for punishment duty in the morning."

"But, sir! I only said—"

"That will be all, Mr. Kitson." Hastings climbed the ladder, an ear splitting silence hurrying him upward. His face appeared through the hatch. A face withdrawn behind vacant eyes, ready to crumble. "Remember, Kitson, I'll see you topside tomorrow. You will endeavor to compensate for this most regrettable omission in your education, while I—I will contemplate the advantages of twentieth century sins."

The hatch closed.

Everyone was suddenly very busy. Holmes picked up empty beer containers and threw them into the deatomizer. A big sandy man laced and unlaced the binding-pad on his bunk. Kitson sat down and stared vacantly.

After three or four minutes he said something.

"The sonovagun," he said. "The poor, poor, sonovagun."

IMPERSONAL words broke into the dream. "We have seen. It is sufficient." The screen flickered and grew dim. "Can you stand further probing, Captain? May we proceed?"

"Yes."

"There is yet one more time. March fifteenth."

"I remember."

"Then relax . . . drift. There are two men. They hang above a yellow sun . . . space sleeps at their feet. . . ."

An image formed and wavered and formed again.

"Their words are whispered . . . they speak softly in the presence of immensity . . ."

It crystallized. . . .

"I'm asking as Vortler, your friend. Not Vortler, the psychosurgeon."

Side by side, they sat in the tattered light of the observation hull. Centauri lay less than one day ahead. It dangled like a full, blush peach, their silhouette its only bruised spot. Rockets hummed.

"There's no use asking any more questions Angus. The time for questions is past. This is exams."

"That's what I mean, John. Remarks like that. You've gotten to be a man who talks to himself."

Hastings sat without moving a muscle. "What did the men tell you?"

"Nothing actually." The other made a nasty sound. "No, that's true. I didn't need them. I've seen it for myself this entire trip."

"And how do you diagnose it, Doctor?" A whisky bottle gleamed in the light of the creamy sun.

"Just like that, he wants it. In two or three words. Where I need books, where Freud took volumes, he wants it in two or three words."

"And the doctor doesn't have them," John said. Angus shook his head. "But I do." He poured from the bottle. "She's seeing Charles."

Vortler snorted. "You're mistaken."

"No, I'm not. I've thought about her a lot these last three months, and I think I know her now." He leaned his head back and shut his eyes. "She's an August woman, Angus. An August woman. One night a warm breeze comes through the

door and sweeps a girl into your arms. You say things, and she says things, and you both end up saying 'I do!' Then she wakes up one morning to find she *doesn't* any more. And another door will open, another breeze carry her off."

"Mary's not like that."

"I didn't think so in the beginning."

"You surprise me, John. I thought you had more faith."

"Not any more. With me, it's what I can touch or smell or hear or see. Nothing more."

"Then there's never an, proof for you. You can't watch her every minute."

John raised himself unsteadily, and stitched his finger into the air. "That, my dear Doctor, is where you are wrong." He stood and groped his way into the light of the cabin. Angus followed, trying to see his face.

"There is something more to this, John. Let's stop the riddles and say what we mean."

The captain spun in sharp, stifled anger. "Shall I tell you, Angus? Shall I let you in on my secret?" The anger detonated. "All right, damn it! You came here for it. I'll give it to you! You know my lightscope? Well, it works. It works fine!"

"What has this—?"

"Do you know what Johnny-boy has been doing with the blasted thing?" he cried. "I've been using it to play inquirer. I've been using it to spy on my wife."

The doctor's jaw dropped. "You have *what?*"

"That's right. Night after night, I've come back here. I've set up the goddammed thing—and I've scanned."

"This is incredible!"

"Three night ago I found New York. Two nights ago, I co-ordinated to the Hudson River. Last night I got as far as the third level. Tonight—" his arms swept a circle—"East Lynne."

Vortler's hand smashed down. "It's got to stop! There's no reason for this. I won't permit it."

"What can you do? It's my lightscope—my ship. My orders supersede yours."

Vortler closed the space between them, his fists knobbed white. John laughed. "Don't overdo it, Angus. I'm not worth it." The sound died to a chuckle. "Besides, remember your emotiograph. Somebody will spank."

The doctor's hands opened slowly, a finger at a time.

"Tell me, Angus. Can you honestly blame me? I suspect my wife. I'm trying to find out."

"But you're wrong!"

"It *could* be. The thing is possible." He leaned toward the psychosurgeon. "You think about it and tell me. It's *possible?*"

Vortler looked defeated.

"Yes."

"And that's that."

Angus started for the barway. "I don't know what started this thing off, John. Perhaps if a man loves his wife a little too much, a thing like this can happen. Maybe that's why they've watched our charts so carefully."

Hastings was already talking to himself. "If I can just prove it one way or the other. If I can just know she's—alone."

The white clad figure paused. "Think it over, John. Change your mind. I don't like any part of it."

"Angus," John said softly. "I don't like it either. I don't want the sight of Mary on that lens! To leave what print? A dream smashed? A dishonor? Who knows?"

The doctor shook his head. "Look out the viewplate, John. What do you see? Planet systems, galaxies, eons. What is one tiny less-than-a-mite in all of that? What does it mean to you? The mind of the Almighty—or a few cents worth of bone, and hair, and tissue? Ask yourself, John. What do you see?"

He closed the barway behind him.

John followed and threw the pressure lock. Going to a sleek instrument, his hands inquired softly along its lines. Cold as space. Sure. Doubt proof. He swept the litter from his desk, and set the instrument in its center. Levers spun, mirrors sent out chips of light, adjusters adjusted.

Then, pausing, he moved to the viewplate and stood looking out a long time.

His hands mangled themselves constantly behind his back. A star twinkled—one star in particular—as if through the prism of a cold tear.

But he went back to the instrument, and bent to it slowly. And as he gripped the desk, his knuckles erupted, pale as washed gravestones. . . .

And the graph lines shivered and glowed hot, and the hate came pouring out of the shining needle between the stars, and somewhere a voice colled into space. . . .

COME back, John Hastings, come back." the Questioner said. "You may return to the present."

Throbbing, the screen died as a stirring exhalation came from the crowd. Someone asked for more air. A baby cried, and was lulled to sleep.

"We have seen the pictures, Captain Hastings, and we accept them. The facts were presented as they happened. It is unfortunate that we can show no evidence of what reached John Hastings' eye as he looked into the electron-lightscope. Mechanical tabulations cannot be transmitted to our screen, since its envisioning powers are limited to the sensory memory patterns of the brain. We must therefore go to the defendant himself for further evidence."

They had removed the heavy mesh, but the captain's head remained bowed.

"Do you swear, John Hastings, that by the power of the God whom we know to be, and by the strength of your own mind, you will tell us what you saw in that instrument?"

"I do so swear."

"You may proceed."

He drew himself together. "I found her at her mother's house. Even though it's vacant now, she liked to go back there occasionally when I was away."

The twelve other jurors were leaning forward in their boxes. I could feel my body itching from the strain.

"You located her at her mother's house, at 4AH54 on the Third Level, Eighty-first Sector, west of the Hudson?"

"I did."

"Continue."

"She was sitting on the lawn in front of the house, talking to a man. His back was toward me."

"You could not see his face?"

"Not then."

"Go on."

"They talked for a while. Then he moved to her on the grass. She smiled and they put their arms around one another. He kissed her."

"What happened then?"

"He lifted her to her feet, and I saw it was Charles Lathrop. They went to the door, and she opened it." He found it hard to get the words past his lips.

"Please proceed."

"When she got inside, she turned around and smiled. It looked as if she was laughing at me. Then she reached out and touched his arm. She—she—"

"Please speak louder. She what?"

"She took him inside and shut the door."

Heaped silence greeted the words. Men turned quietly and gazed at their wives, their eyes asking a question for the bewildered, the undecided.

"John Hastings, we have checked thoroughly. Your wife did spend the night of the fifteenth in the vacant house of which you speak. She spent the night, however, alone. Her graphs show no disturbances, no emotional exhilaration. You are perpetrating an untruth."

"I'm not. I saw it! I saw it as plainly as I can see the box in which I am standing now."

"You could not have seen it."

"Before my God, I did! I saw every detail. The yellow pannier she wore. The blue hydrangea bush on the lawn. That broken aneroid beside the door. Every detail." His voice crescendoed.

"It is impossible"

HE RAISED his fists in the air. "Say it's impossible if you like. Repeat it a thousand times! But I saw her do it just the same!! I *saw* it!"

Something inside me had pulled tight. Thoughts of the classroom flooded into my mind. Long forgotten formulae, theories . . . somewhere! The voice droned on, charging the jurors:

"—having reviewed the evidence—"

I kept groping toward a page in a book. Somewhere there was a piece that would fit in. "The majority ballot rules." It was going too fast for me. They were calling for the vote.

"Juror Number One, please stand and tell the court; how do you find?"

With great deliberation, be turned his back on the defendant in the box.

"Juror Number One designates guilt. Juror Number Two, how do you find?"

Vortler was second. He stood and gazed at John Hastings for a long moment. Then he raised his arms toward the defendant, palms upward.

"Juror Number Two designates innocence."

I went back to the classroom again and again. There was a thing waiting there for me, but it had been so long ago.

The count was going fast. . . .

"Juror Number Six, how do you find?" Bax. I knew his vote before he cast it. He turned his back.

Where did it stand now? Four guilty, two innocent!

My heart began to pound. It felt as if I were standing on the edge of a deep water. Where was it, that I groped after? I tried to shut myself in and think.

The semi-circle was almost completed. The voice had reached the juror on my left. Six men stood with their backs to John Hastings. Five stood with their arms outstretched, "Juror Number Twelve, how do you find?"

I asked for help then. I asked the Lord to turn the pages. And I asked Him to help Kitson too. Kitson raised his arms high. The score was even.

It waited until then to come. The piece . . . the little piece, falling on my brain from that half-forgotten book.

"Juror Number Thirteen, how do—?"

"Mr. Questioner," I cried. "I would like to interpose."

"It is incorrect procedure to interrupt the vote—"

"Yes, yes, I know." My voice shook. "But there is something I just remembered. Something pertinent to what John Hastings saw."

"Can it prove anything further one way or the other?"

"I think so."

An unseen conference. "Very well. Dispensation granted. What is your information?"

I took a deep breath. "John Hastings viewed his wife on Earth from one of the planets of Alpha Centauri."

"That is correct."

My tongue was dry; my hands wet.

"Alpha Centauri is four years, four months distant, measuring in light years. Therefore, in his travel, John Hastings lost three of those months, but when he turned his instrument backward, he was looking at light images which had started from the Earth long before he ever left it. He was looking at—"

"At . . . what happened four years ago. . . ." John Hastings had finished the sentence for me. He was looking at something as if it were the first sunrise he had ever known.

Speculation brought the amphitheatre to its feet. For the only time during the trial, the mob found its voice. Uncertainty, relief and surprise mingled, ebbed and flowed.

The voice called for attention. "Quiet, please, quiet. The information is correct," and the storm was over.

"Since the jury is thus far hung, we will leave the decision to the last, thirteenth talisman. We would like your vote, Juror Thirteen. How do you find?"

John looked at me. It was the first time since they had brought him in.

And I stretched my arms out toward him. . . .

Who can say whether I was right or wrong? It is too delicate a thing to come out all white or all black. But I think that in order for a man to hate a woman so very much, it is also necessary for him to have loved her very much, too.

And sometimes, I wake up, shaking, in the night. I am thinking of what might have happened if I hadn't remembered that old discarded pannier, or the way Mother transplanted the blue hydrangea bush before she died, or how Dad swore when she made him throw that aneroid away. If I hadn't remembered those things, I would never have seen the look on John's face as he walked into my outstretched arms and said: "Is it time for us to go home now, Mary? Is it?"

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AWAKENING

A Novelet by BRYCE WALTON

Perhaps humans cannot live
without loving . . . but Alice,
the android, found she could
love without living. . . .

Illustration by
PAUL ORBAN

THE SCREAM of the commutor jet was bringing Kelsey home broke like glass outside the house.

Startled, Alice realized that she was behind schedule in her household duties. Quickly she switched the news off the Tevee. Master Kelsey hated newscasts. They made him uneasy, particularly with all this talk about a possible air-raid.

Instead, she hurriedly tuned in Kelsey's evening preference: self-improvement commercials with the latest pop-tunes for background.

Then she ran into the bathroom to prepare Kelsey's intricate beauty ritual.

She turned up her thermostat so that her machinery would run a little faster. If she wasn't careful, Master

Kelsey would trade her in for a more modern and physically attractive domestic.

She heard footsteps in the hall. His footsteps—

In another few seconds he would be there, real, breathing, but unobtainable, a living dream, something on the other side of the looking glass.

Oh the pain, the indescribable pain of love, greater and deeper and drowning love, going out and out all the time and never coming back again. Painful, painful unrequited love.

The cumulative loneliness, the hours of lonely loving, the hours and days and weeks and years of tireless mechanical walking in the indifferent round of the hours of her life. The loneliness of loving something that can never love in return, that doesn't even know of your love, that can't even conceive of your being able to love.

For you are only a machine and your soul can never be shared; for only you know that you have a soul, and it is an accident and no one could even suspect that it could possibly be—this crying hungry, yearning, lonely soul.

Without effort she could have cried out her heart to Master Kelsey, but she had not been made to cry, and no one would think of looking for her heart, or soul. Or the lonely yearning of the heart or soul.

For the soul can be trapped in ugliness, or in the slashing streak of electrons. Dying there, the soul alone can mourn its dying, for who can feel the soul in the rectifiers and diods, or behind the ugliness of a distorted shell?

I was very good for her, she thought, that no one, no human, including Master Kelsey could never guess at the awful intensity, the terrible hunger of the soul that kept loving in silence, alone, in the dark, behind the plastoid walls of an inhuman shell.

Master Kelsey came into the living room, tall and broad and beautiful and neat in his business suit, his blond hair in a waving shine. But with that tired sharp look to his mouth in spite of its frozen smile. He always seemed so relieved to see her standing there waiting, responsive, receptive, an understanding shadow that filled up his frightened loneliness between the time of his arrival and the absorption in Tevee, or the always demanded presence of guests.

He leaned wearily against the wall, breathing heavily as though he had been running from something for a long time.

"Hello, hello, Alice," he said quickly, forcing exaggerated joy into the greeting to conceal something full of fear.

"Hello, Master Kelsey. You had a fine day at the office?"

"Fine! It was great, simply perfect!" He said it almost fiercely, as though even a robot might challenge the statement.

As he stared at the Tevee's hypnotic glow, his face began to relax a little. "Everybody," he whispered, "was happy today. The Manager gave our office group a Silver Star for being tops in the Group Sociability scale for the week."

"That's wonderful, Master Kelsey!"

He stared at her. "I wish they had made you so you could smile more, Alice. The way you look, it—it gives me a sort of doubtful feeling sometimes."

If you only knew how I felt, my dearest Kelsey, inside, inside the machinery that has the cold and tiny shell. I'm all one great warm smile of joy just to be near you, darling Kelsey.

"I'm happy for you, Master Kelsey," she said.

He nodded slowly.

Why wasn't he happier, she wondered, as she had wondered so many times before. He had all that anyone should need to be happy. In the first place, he was human among many others who were human. And then all the other things, and the woman, the woman he loved, Gloria Tonnencourt, the woman he loved, loved, loved—

Gloria was coming over to see him tonight. Alice would have to watch it again, hear it again. She would have to listen again to love, while she stood alone and frozen in the dark closet of her own longings.

"Alice?"

"Yes."

"It's that ten minutes on the commutor to the jet station. Don't they realize that a man is alone those ten minutes? Nobody else to talk to. No Tevee. No sound even. Alone."

SHE NODDED. He was asking *her* if she knew what loneliness was!

He started for the bathroom, as though to avoid thinking of something.

"Everything ready for my love?" he

asked nervously.

"Yes," she said. Yes, the robot says. Yes, my love, everything is ready for your love.

"Good."

In the bathroom, Kelsey looked in the full length mirror, and Alice watched him.

"Master Kelsey," the Mirror said, softly critical. "You're not smiling."

"But I am."

"Yes, but not enough."

Kelsey touched his lips and stretched his face muscles. The Mirror said, "People are uneasy when you don't smile."

Alice knew how much Kelsey respected his Mirror. It had cost him so much, and it was the most popular item advertised on Tevee. It was finely attuned to Kelsey's personality. It knew when he was not looking exactly right to meet the strict demands of the crowd.

"Smile and the group will love you," the Mirror said. "Frown, and you may frown alone."

Kelsey was suddenly smiling intensely, as though his very life had been threatened.

"That's better," the Mirror said.

Alice had tried so hard and so often to smile, pulling at the plastoid stuff of her face. She guessed that humans were supposed to smile all the time, and robots never. Why should a robot smile. A robot had nothing to sell. It had routine functions, but it had nothing to sell.

Kelsey zipped himself out of his clothes and jumped into the shower. He was six feet tall. He had blue eyes and wavy hair with streaks of brown in the Viking yellow. His skin was golden and his muscles moved with fluid healthy power. His daily stint in the male beauty clinic at the factory kept him in top condition. And the Mirror was always alert to detect any flaw in his outward appearance.

But who will love you when you're old, Master Kelsey? When the gold turns gray and the muscles shrink and the teeth decay and the eyes turn pale and the body is bent with the squeezing hands of time?

Let me stay, darling Kelsey. Let me stay forever, and I'll love you when you're old.

Seeing his strong naked beauty there, she felt her machinery pounding and the burning in her eyes. It wasn't anything that could be controlled by the thermostat. She needed his arms, and the feel of his power. Like a long wave her love came to her lips in strange words, childish words, moist and tender. And unheard by Master Kelsey.

She turned away. She looked at the blankness of the wall. Please, please let me be careful. If I am not careful I will be sent away, away where there is no Kelsey, away where they will take my soul.

"Do you think Gloria will like me more tonight than she did the last time she was here, Alice?"

"I'm sure she will, Master Kelsey."

The woman's face on the Tevee screen covering one wall of the bathroom was a kind of subtle threat, Alice thought:

"Are you sure you're exercising the maximum acceptability of which your personality is capable? Do you sometimes feel that in some intangible way you are offending your friends? The self-analysis, personology chart scale guarantees to dig out the most hidden blocks to full and joyful acceptance by others. Send for your personology chart at once!"

"That's something new isn't it Alice?"

"I believe it is, Master Kelsey."

"Well, put in an order. Put an order in right now!"

Alice punched the order button on the side of the wall next to the Tevee screen. Whatever item was being advertised at the time the button was punched was automatically ordered, the consumer's name and address recorded, the price deducted from his salary, and an extra point added to his consumer's cooperative card for the year.

It was not only very important how many items one ordered in a year, but also the kinds of items. Items that aided an employee in being acceptable to the office group were especially smiled upon by Office Managers. Alice had always been careful to get in every such order.

Alice knew all about the system. She knew all about Kelsey's work. She had listened to him talking about it endlessly, either to her or to others. She had watched Kelsey rise from Office Boy to Chief Clerk, getting the glad reports of his progress every evening. She couldn't imagine anyone at the office being more likeable than Kelsey. He was so human, she had thought, so human—

"Alice?"

"Yes, Master Kelsey?"

"Did you ever find that paper?"

She turned quickly. She could feel fear.

Did they know that a robot could feel fear as well as love? Could anyone, or anything, feel one without the other? Did they know that a robot, at least this robot, could feel fear at the idea of being labeled inefficient, and being sent back to the factory and remade, rebuilt, dismantled, changed—and probably having a soul burned out that no one had ever known was there? Did they know that if a robot could feel love or fear, that it could also steal, deliberately steal and hide something?

"You mean the paper from the office?"

"Yes, yes, Alice. The order paper."

"No," she said. She hesitated and said it again. "No."

"I'm sure I brought it home. Well, the only thing to do is mark it as lost, and have another order made out tomorrow. No real hurry I guess. Only one more receptionist to be replaced."

SHE HAD stolen it. She had hidden it. She would never never use it of course. That would be impossible, too risky, too frightening even to think about actually doing. But it was there to dream about. She was good at dreaming. When you stand alone in the dark of a dark, dark closet every night, and when you're alone almost all the time of the day or night, dreaming becomes an art, a necessary art. It becomes the shield against dying inside, losing the soul, being the robot you were originally designed to be.

It was there, hidden in her closet. She stood alone with it at night in the dark closet, and with the dream—a piece of paper, an order blank—she was not so much alone. . . .

Kelsey stood under the perfumed deodorant spray for three minutes. He ran out to the sink and sprayed his mouth with Noffend. And then he held his mouth open while Alice brushed his teeth carefully with Ivory-Glo. He zipped into his lounge suit of coral pink and ran to the Mirror.

"Well?" he asked.

"Very saleable, Kelsey," the Mirror said.

Kelsey sat down in the living room to wait for his favorite love.

Alice watched Kelsey's love, who didn't seem to see Alice at all when she came in, but then domestics had no meaning to anyone but their Masters. Gloria—golden flesh; warm and human love of Kelsey; love in a transparent gown tight and clinging to the flesh; warm and waiting love. Love kissing and kissing—but Alice tried not to look at love.

Some time ago, she had liked looking at love, but now she felt fear, fear of love-kissing. She felt an intense hunger that had elements of terror blended with elements of awakening as she looked at it, trying not to look or feel any connection with it.

But she felt the desire, growing from evening to evening as she remembered or looked at, Kelsey and his love-loving and hugging and kissing—the desire to hold him, to feel him her own, so as never to let him leave, never let him escape, never let herself be taken from him and rebuilt and lost. And that was the cause of the desire, making it agonizingly stronger. And the sight of it—the sight and sound of the loving, the kisses, the motions of loving—were more and more unbearable.

Gloria was beautiful, so beautiful. She was slim and warm and tall and curved and human.

But Alice had to look just the same, as though there was some last justification in looking because it could never happen to Alice, because they were human and she was not.

They were sitting tightly entwined about one another on the couch.

"We ought to get a roommate permit real fast," Kelsey said in a whisper.

"But it hasn't been two weeks yet since the office party," Gloria said.

That was where they had met and knew it was love, at the office party.

"But maybe if we asked—" Kelsey said.

"But we shouldn't rush it honey. It wouldn't be *sincere!*"

"Yes, that's true," Kelsey said. "What would people think?"

And then, as Alice watched, they seemed to draw slowly apart as though the face, the color, the sound and voices from the Tevee was throwing an invisible wall between them. They were staring at the Tevee longer and longer and finally they weren't looking at one another at all.

There were always a number of people present inside the Tevee frame. If one person was talking, the background was full of people—people moving, dancing, walking, but there just the same, always.

The woman was smiling intensely out of

the screen. "Don't be left out," she said. "Be a solid member of your group. You can own a Sky-Splitter jet sporter now without offending your crowd. Our special consumer's research proves that now at last these amazing Sky-Splitters are no longer *conspicuous* items, but are fully *accepted* as *normal* by over ninety-three per cent of the consumer public. You can enjoy the cloud thrills of a Sky-Splitter without being considered in any way *eccentric*. Press your Interest or Order button now! An immediate demonstration will be arranged!"

Dancers swirled. A Sky-Splitter jet dissolved from clouds. It was as if a dream had become abruptly real. Surrounded by people laughing and accepting one another, the sleek projectile gave the warmest impression of itself being organic and one of the happy, happy crowd.

Kelsey jerked forward and jabbed the I-Am-Interested button.

"I don't care," Gloria pouted. "I'd still feel kind of—well—like I was showing off if I had a Sky-Splitter."

"But now everybody will have one," Kelsey said.

Alice wondered when they were *really* going to make love. Like the lovers were always never quite doing on Tevee. But Alice decided she would never look at that. It would hurt too much.

ANOTHER self-improvement commercial. This time a man with a ballet in the background.

"Are you in tune with your crowd? If you do not feel that your tastes are in perfect accord with the tastes of your group, send for the Reacto Tester. This mechanical device, when attached to the brain, records accurate tastes. It insures comforting conformity, and protects you against the anxieties of conspicuousness. Remember, you can't stray from the norm with a Reacto.

Kelsey and his love had moved apart now. They were staring at the Tevee. Everything the Tevee had to say seemed to involve getting along with people, being loved, being liked, being accepted, not being rejected, not offending, how to love efficiently, how to be loved gracefully—

But there they are, the two of them, Alice thought. What are they waiting for?

Waiting to look just right, to smile just right. It was a matter of appearance. No one knew that better than Alice did who looked all wrong and could never look any different, never look human, never look full of love.

You smiled when you loved. You smiled and your flesh turned warm. If you had flesh. If your warmth was not a dial to be turned up or down. If on the outside you were human so that everyone could know.

"Oh, Alice," Kelsey called out.

Alice came in from the kitchen. "Yes, Master Kelsey."

Gloria stared on and on into the Tevee while its color flickered over her half sleeping face.

"Tomorrow's your rest day, Alice."

"Yes, Master Kelsey."

"Well, you can go stand in your closet now. That will give you all night and all day tomorrow to rest. Is everything taken care of around the place for Tuesday?"

"Yes, Master Kelsey."

Kelsey smiled at Alice. He whispered low, "She likes me a little more, don't you think so, Alice?"

"Yes."

He smiled more widely. "Well, Alice, good night. Relax your thermostat."

Kelsey laughed as she bowed slightly and walked out onto the porch and opened the door of her closet and got inside and stood there, the four walls almost touching her when the door closed and she stood alone in the loneliness of her darkness and silence.

For a long time it had been a rich darkness filled with an ever growing understanding of berself in a world alone, in a darkness all her own, where there could never be others of her kind, and lonely darkness was her only friend.

But it was different now. Love made the loneliness unbearable. Love turned lonely darkness to stabbing pain. Now it seemed like death. No, death was nothing. This was worse than death. This was not being, unbeing. A being that was not a being, but something never able to break from its shell, staying shut up forever in its mechanical confines.

They did not give me life, she thought. They sat me down before the world's stage to watch without being able to understand. Now I understand, but I cannot live.

She clenched her hands and trembled in the dark, and felt the quickening beat of the

things that made her run.

In the dark, the suffocating dark now that she knew what it could mean to really be alive and not one of the walking dead. In the dark, alone, dreaming of Kelsey, dreaming of human heart touching human heart, of the lips of his kiss, of his arms around her neck; longing for the face of Kelsey next to her own in darkness lit by love, to take his mouth, to cover his body with kisses, to clasp his neck in her hands—

And there alone where she had dreamed a thousand dreams, she knew she could no longer merely dream. Dreams were not enough.

Not enough! Not enough!

A silent scream shrieked inside the narrow closet and cut the dark to tatters, and she ran out, out into the back yard of Kelsey's house and stood under the open sky.

She had the order blank, the paper, in her hand. A thing stolen, the result of an act no robot could be guilty of because no robot had a soul.

But I have a soul. There is a point at which the soul is sick. At this point one awakens—awakens or dies.

CLUTCHING the paper she had stolen from her love, she ran toward the Commutor jet station. Nowhere was there a light; not even from the city ten miles from the housing project in which Kelsey lived. But Alice had no thought whatever of an air-raid. There were worse darknesses than a blackout. There were worse ways to die than under a rain of white fire bombs.

The fear of the bombs was the fear of never having lived, not a fear of dying.

The fear was over. There was only hope. The commitment was made. Nothing could be worse than the way it had been, and failure could be only a final admission of a defeat that had been there all the time.

She got off the Commutor Jet at the uptown station and walked through darkness. She walked alone in the city. No human being would have been walking in the darkness. They were hovering together behind blacked-out windows in groups. But she felt nothing as she walked in the blackness.

She knew where the Clinic was. The address was on the order blank

She hurried faster and faster. At no moment in her life had she felt dawning in her such a hope of happiness, such a feeling of ecstasy. At no time, even in her deepest dreams, had she dreamed that she might really be loved by Master Kelsey.

It was such a daring scheme that she even hesitated to think about it, afraid it might be merely a projection of a dream.

In black print at the top of the Order Blank were the words:

FIX ME PLEASE!
Make me beautiful!
MAKE ME PLEASANT TO THE CUSTOMERS, AND A LOVELY ROBOT TO REMEMBER!

Alice was a domestic. She was not supposed to carry that order to the Clinic and be fixed up. The order blank was strictly for specialized receptionist robots, office workers, robots that had to have a different sort of front to meet the consumer public. Originally, all robots had been made to look alike. But now, for psychological reasons, it had been decided to change the outward appearance of receptionists and other robots that met the general public.

They had to be lovely to look at, and be able to smile in the most pleasant way possible.

Laboring robots, domestics, their form was more functional than beautiful. It lacked the surface polish of the office-working robots. And yet Alice knew that one of the beautiful receptionist robots for example was indeed beautiful, and that it was almost impossible to distinguish them from beautiful human beings.

It was daring and risky enough to be going to the clinic to pretend she was a receptionist from Kelsey's office, there to be beautified. It was a lot more risky and daring to have the idea that she might be beautiful enough to pass herself off, at least for a little while, as a human being!

But she had one big advantage. They would never suspect her. They had no idea, she was sure of that, that any robot could act of her own free will, and steal an order blank, and pretend to be something she was not in order to be made beautiful.

A receptionist robot looked just like a beautiful human woman. She only acted like a robot. But if I looked like that, so beautiful, I could feel human too. I could *be* human.

Kelsey could give back my love to me, and

our hearts would kiss and loneliness would die.

This was Monday. Tomorrow was her rest day. She wouldn't be missed as Alice the domestic until Wednesday morning.

She didn't want to think about what might happen after that. There would have to be something happen when Alice the domestic was reported missing. But then she was running way ahead of herself. It was still only a hope that her scheme would work the way she had to dream that it would.

She went in out of the dark into the Clinic building. The receptionist behind the shiny chrome desk in the outer office hardly looked at Alice at all. Alice looked at her though. It was impossible to tell whether the receptionist was human or not. But she was beautiful. As beautiful as Gloria Tonnencourt.

A sign on the wall behind the receptionist said:

BEAUTY IS AS BEAUTY DOES

The order blank was stamped with a number and Alice was told to wait.

Sitting there, waiting, she felt as though something steel-edged had smashed into her chest. She felt cold, and adjusted her thermostat slightly. The steely sensation increased. Her hands were clenched. She felt something inside of her pounding and pounding.

I can tell you all my thoughts at last now, Master Kelsey, darling darling Kelsey. I can tell you all the hopes without achievement, all about the endless dark hours alone—

Her number was called and she went in through a door that seemed to lead into an endlessly narrowing white funnel lined with shiny doors.

THE ROOM of hope was a square white box filled with shiny chrome cabinets. In the center was a table on little silent rubber wheels, with a lamp looking down upon it like a gigantic unblinking eye.

A slight willowy man gushed at her and gripped her arms with exuberance, and covered her over with the moist film of his bright and eager eyes.

His voice was high and shrill. "So you want to be beautiful, lovely to look at?"

"Yes."

"You shall be, my dear. Lie down please, lie down and trust me. You will have to trust me, of course. Simply have to trust me just the same."

"Will I be really beautiful—like the receptionist in the outer office?"

"Ha, ha, my dear!" He was pushing and pulling and finally she was lying down and staring at the whirling lines of the white ceiling and seeing Kelsey's smiling waiting yearning face in it. "That is a joke, a very funny joke. The receptionist out there is a human being. At least she would lead the unsuspecting to believe that she is. However, I must confess, my dear, that I have learned the sad truth that she is human in name only, that her heart is ice, and she is bitter with ambition."

"But she is so beautiful."

"Ah, but beauty is as beauty does, my dear. Or as beauty thinks. And sweet little ambitious Della in the outer office does not think lovely thoughts. Not at all, believe me. I have learned that from sad experience."

His hands hovered over her eagerly, fluidly, as though there were no bones in them.

"I want to be as beautiful as possible."

"You are fortunate in having been sent to Julian. I promise that under my touch you shall blossom into radiant beauty, the essence of feminine loveliness. You will be simply devastating."

He placed the tips of his long white fingers together and studied her with his head angled like a bird's "A brunette, I think—"

"I'd rather be a blonde."

"Oh, you would, would you, my dear! You seem extraordinarily concerned for a robot." He stepped back and studied her curiously and the black eyes sharpened like narrowing beams of black searching light.

"You know," he said softly, "I studied in the greatest Salons of the continent to beautify women. Now I specialize in beautifying robots. Why? Simple but paradoxical, but not as paradoxical as it might seem. I can make a robot lovelier than a human."

"Lovelier than a human being!"

"Exactly. Much lovelier. Beauty comes from within as the sages say. It comes from the heart and the soul, my dear. And so few humans any longer have either heart or soul. Of course, that would imply that robots do have hearts and souls, so please, my dear, do not repeat what I have said. Already I am thought to be excessively eccentric for this sad conformistic age of orth-

odoxy and stupid unimaginative dependency. Beauty comes from individuality and strength, my dear. It comes from sadness and the ability to admit a sense of tragedy. Ah—but it is sad for me, for Julian, my dear. That my fulfillment comes only from adding a sense of life to humanoids. And looking at you—the likes of you—sometimes I wonder if you—"

His voice trailed off like smoke and he shrugged and waved his hands in the air. "So you want to be a blonde. Why a blonde?"

"A tall blonde," she said, "with lots and lots of sex appeal."

He kissed the tips of his fingers and rolled his eyes. "Your wish shall be granted. I, Julian, will outdo myself." He leaned over her. His voice was low. "Why is it that a robot can be made more beautiful than a human? Tell me, my dear, tell me and I shall never tell anyone else. Do you have a soul? Do you have a heart? Do you know what it is to be sad and alone and can you find some pleasure in it? Do you perhaps even find pleasure in yourself, and sometimes find it unnecessary to swim in a sea of humanity like a brainless protozoon?"

"But will I feel real, the way a human feels?"

He straightened up slowly. He touched his forehead, where beads of sweat were forming, and slowly he licked his thin red lips.

"My, my, but you are an inquisitive robot! Why does it mean so much?"

"Tell, me, will I feel like the real thing? Flesh—when you touch flesh—"

His hands moved over her. He bent above her. A cabinet slid open. She caught the glint of many different colors of eyeballs looking startlingly real and liquidly alive, and rows of variously sized breasts, and lips, and muscle paddings, and eyelashes and eyebrows and ears and noses and fingers. There were gleaming instruments and jars and plastic tapes.

His face was close above hers and his lips worked nervously. He whispered, "I can see how it will be, my dear. You will feel so real to the touch of a hungry love that I shall be broken-hearted to let you go from my Pygmalion Palace of dreams come true. My dear, believe me. Believe Julian when he tells you this—there is no lonelier being in the world than a man who has not forgotten what beauty is in a world that has turned ugly from having lost its soul."

Then she knew that Julian had turned off her thermostat. Suddenly there was no feeling, no sound, no sight except that of the general blackout rushing in out of the night, down the halls, into the rooms, into her eyes.

How quickly and painlessly a robot could die, she thought. How easy it was to live and die and come back to life. You could be born suddenly full-grown and efficient. You could be blotted out again, just as suddenly. You could be born in any shape or size, born to do any one or combination of so many different things, and when your job was done you could so quickly be put to rest again. You could be born ugly, or round, or square, or like a pyramid, or something almost all arms, or legs, or eyes, or ears.

You could be born beautiful, hardly distinguishable from a beautiful human being who could receive love.

You could be born ugly and then be killed and brought back again as beautiful as a human being.

But you could not live without love.

Could something be returned that no one knew was there?

SHE STOOD before the mirror, hardly daring to breathe.

"Oh God," Julian whispered. He stood in a corner of the room, and his eyes were narrowed and his hands were gripped together. "I knew I was a genius. But this—this is something else! What have I done? Statues turned to living beauty. What in the name of God is this?"

"I'm beautiful," she said.

"Yes, yes," he said thickly. "Yes—"

"As beautiful as Gloria."

"Whoever she is, yes, yes—"

"He will love me."

"I love you, my dear, I love you," he whispered again and again.

A great calm came over her. A great calm and a great chill. She felt uneasy because she felt so wonderful, too wonderful, too uneasy, as if she might feel too deeply and something inside would break.

She felt Julian's hand on her and he was turning her around. "I must kiss you," he said. "I must kiss you. I love you."

"Yes," she smiled. "You may kiss me."

She imagined it was Kelsey kissing her. Kelsey's arms were around her neck, and she was longing for the face of Kelsey. She moved her lips over his forehead and his cheeks until she felt the moistness of his mouth. She saw the unsettled look in Julian's face and the sweat on his upper lip. It was her first kiss, and it was Kelsey she kissed.

Julian stepped back and touched his lips. He shook his head and jerked his face nervously toward the door.

He stared into her eyes. His fingers ran over her face. "Now I see it," he whispered hoarsely. "Now I see it. It was there before, before I ever touched you. It was in your eyes. I've always known that. I've known that no one creates beauty out of pastes and tape and foam rubber and false hair."

"I must go now," she said. "I must hurry."

"That's right, that's very right. You've got to go out of here, out of my sight and out of my mind!"

"Do I feel real?"

"My God! There's this light—that is what you feel—the light! Listen, listen to me whoever, whatever, you are. Listen. What's happening? You're more real than the woman who invites me to her apartment and assures me with insipid smiles and phony gestures that she is real. What's real? You're real—hut you can't be real!"

He turned away from her and leaned against the wall. There was a catch in his voice, and she could see the throbbing in the side of his neck. "You had better go now. And tomorrow I won't remember you. I'm prohably going crazy. Beginning to believe in my own pitiful wishes. Everyone I know —all of them—shells of phony beauty, something painted on, something stuck on the outside. Nothing real, nothing real at all. And what do I do—dream? Dream of somehow hringing real beauty back. But it never comes back! Beauty comes from inside. I cannot paste it onto the outside of a hollow shell and make beauty come alive!"

"Julian—"

He blinked at her, as though startled and afraid. "What has happened with you? How many like you are there? No, I can't start believing such an incredihle thing. I'd he lost. Get out! Get out!"

She touched his shoulder. "Goodhye," she said softly. "I know what loneliness is."

When he turned to her again there were tears in his eyes. He whispered, "I believe you do—you really do. But how could it he? How could you have inside of you what we humans are losing?"

She sat in the Commutor Jet, returning to Master Kelsey. She knew that looking like a beautiful woman was not quite enough. She had to know the right things to say. She felt that she did know all the correct retorts, quips, the polite gestures and nuances and intonations that made one innocuously acceptahle. She had watched the Teevee for years as they explained how to win people and influence the right friends, and gain the maximum amount of response from the group, from love, from whoever was joining their smile with yours.

She had learned all the controversial things that must never he talked about, and all the popular immediate things that should be talked about incessantly. But she felt an intense need for rehearsal. This had to be successful. She had committed herself. She could not fail. Failure meant a return to the factory and the final fatal twist of the thermostat. It would not he murder, for they were ignorant of the existence of a robot's soul. And she didn't care about the risk. She would feel her love for Kelsey returned; she would feel his arms, his lips, his love. Let them, whoever they were, worry about the disappearance of a drab domestic named Alice.

Alice was dead. Alice had been reborn. Alice had come out of the lonely dark of unborn waste into the living light of love.

She carried on this imagined conversation with Kelsey, rehearsing. No, it was not enough to be filled to overflowing with love. You had to know how to act, you had to smile all the time, you had to say the right things and know when not to speak. Beauty is as beauty does.

"Well," the imaginary Kelsey said, smiling, "do you like Arnso's new hit recording, I'LL ALWAYS WANT YOU, as much as the one he recorded last week?"

"It's wonderful," she said, smiling. "The sweetest thing since WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER, NO MATTER WHAT. Which reminds me, honey. I'm going to huy one of those new Snap-Grav-Share-The-Fall suits. Don't you think they would he fun?"

"Lots of fun," the imagihary Kelsey said

smiling. "Six people instead of three can share it. The more the merrier."

IN HER MIND, the imaginary Kelsey hesitated, then said, "What Quik-Pik book are you reading right now?"

"Which one are *you* reading, honey?" she evaded.

You never read anything everyone else wasn't reading; she knew that much.

"Well, I like MY DAY AT THE OFFICE. It shows how a woman gets through a day with her fellow workers in her office, how she smiles and is pleasant and well-liked and never loses her temper. It shows all the little tricks you can pull that help you sell yourself."

"That sounds like a wonderful book, honey. I'll get it at once!"

It sounded right. But there was something wrong. It was the right thing to talk about, but it wasn't what she would prefer to talk about if she were alone with Kelsey. Feeling the way she felt, she didn't think she would want to talk much at all if she were alone with Kelsey.

But she knew that was a real social taboo—not saying anything at all.

Anyway, she gave herself a Gold Star for being so sociable with the imaginary Kelsey. She was sure, very sure, she could sell herself to Kelsey.

Only she would have to have another name. Two names. Human names. Something that sounded beautiful.

Anita. Anita Starre.

She would knock on Master Kelsey's door and ask him for someone's address. He was so nice and considerate he would surely ask her in for a drink, or just ask her in, while he gave her directions.

Dry leaves crackled under her as she walked the half-block toward Kelsey's house. The night was black with a few cold stars in the endless vault of sky. It was late, but in almost all the houses you could see the gentle glow of Tevee color through the windows.

There was no sound at all where the houses of the project, all looking exactly the same, dwindled away into darkness like lines of dots made by a typewriter.

It was, she thought, as though everyone and everything in the world were waiting, waiting for the great white hot scream to explode in the night, the great awakening, the blinding hot flash of awakening that comes before the end. But Alice didn't feel afraid at all of an air-raid as she walked up onto Master Kelsey's porch and rang the bell. There had been so many false alarms, she wondered sometimes if there was any real threat at all. The war—a vague thing far away, never here, always somewhere else, but always supposed to be getting nearer. The war with the Asians—it just went on and on, you heard about it, and saw it on Tevee if you weren't afraid to look at the newscasts, but it never seemed to happen here.

His footsteps behind the door. The door opening. His shadow there, the pink lounge suit, the wavy hair with streaks of brown in the Viking yellow, the face sleepy from Teevee coming awake as he saw the beautiful woman standing there smiling. He smiled. Their smiles met.

"Hello," she said. "I'm Anita Starre. I'm looking for 16-03074 Carnegie Way."

"You're lost?"

"I seem to be lost, yes."

The great hope dawned in her as he smiled at her in a way no robot had ever been smiled at. A tender calm moved over her. The machinery that made her go, the sparks that made her live, all seemed to jump and tremble under the beautiful shell that had been created by the hands of Julian.

The great joy filled her, surged inside her. She could be near, so near him, now that she had the right look and the right smile. She could tell him and show him how she loved to be near him—No, she would not have to tell him that; he would know. Real love you just knew about. You didn't have to say it. She would just kiss him and kiss him and never have to tell him—

"This is Carnegie Way," Kelsey was saying. His eyes were fixed on her face, then his eyes were brightening as they looked at her height and her slim rich curves. "But it's five blocks from the address you're looking for." He pointed to the left and told her how to get to 16-03074. His eyes continued to explore her figure with just the right degree of polite interest.

She stepped closer until she was almost inside the hallway. She could feel the warmth of him. "Why," she said suddenly, "you're Mr. Kelsey!"

His smile broadened with some hungry concept of himself that had been fed. "But

how did you know, Miss Starre?"

"A girl friend of mine, Miss Davies, works in your office."

"Oh, Miss Davies! She got a Silver Star—"

"Yes, she admires you so much. She has a picture of you, Mr. Kelsey. She told me how you won a Golden Star for being so cooperative."

"We all help one another. Miss Davies is such a wonderfully warm and sympathetic girl. Well, Miss Starre, what a coincidence!"

"Isn't it?"

"Well—maybe you could come in and rest a few minutes. We're watching Tevee."

She nodded quickly. She felt that magnetic force, the clicking communion, the way she had always seen it on Tevee. How easy it was, after all, if you looked right and smiled right and said the correct things.

"Oh, I'd love to!"

MISS GLORIA TONNENCOURT stood up, and the three of them seemed subdued and softened in the Tevee light. Kelsey said, "Gloria, this is a friend of mine, a really dear friend, Anita Starre."

There was something wrong. It was under the surface, Alice thought, but it was there. Under the smiles, something tense and wrong and dangerous. She had never felt it before, but she felt it now. It was Gloria, the way the smile seemed set on Gloria's face as she said she was very pleased to meet Miss Starre. It had always been there, that smile, so it couldn't go away, but Alice knew that if she were Miss Tonnencourt she would not feel like smiling. No one could smile, she thought, if they were losing their love. Real love you could die of losing.

They all smiled at one another. Kelsey got three drinks and they drank to one another's happiness as though there was no question that there could be anything else in the world but happiness.

Gloria has to do what's right, Alice thought. No matter how painful, she has to do what's right. I'm lucky because she has to do what's right, because she always has to be a good sport about everything.

They chatted together like good sports for a while, talked about the pop tune of the week, the favorite sports hero of the day, the best Quik-Pik book of the hour, the Sky-Splitter, the Roaromatic Roadeater, the Silver and Golden Stars for cooperation, the Blue Stars for communal feeling. The Carnegie Awards for sociability.

They have to get along, Alice thought gladly. They have to get along. They can't afford to offend one another.

Gloria finally got up, seeming tired in spite of her smile, and said, "I'd better be going now. I—I can see that you two have a real thing for one another already. I—I think it's just—wonderful—so wonderful, really—"

Kelsey didn't seem to hear Gloria at all, hardly seemed to know she was there. He kept looking at Alice. "Please don't go, Gloria," he said as he kept on looking at Alice.

"It's awfully sweet of you to ask me to stay, but I really must go now. It's—it's getting late."

I know how you really feel, Alice thought. I know, I know, somewhere deep inside you feel an awful sickness like death, but on the outside you smile. I know how you feel.

But do you know how you feel anymore, Gloria? Can you feel the way you really feel? What would happen if—

But no matter how Gloria felt, no Mirror on a wall could have been critical of her appearance, her poise, her polite good-sport way of bowing out.

Gloria moved toward the door. Kelsey hurried over there and opened it for her. "You two be happy," Gloria whispered. "You two seem to be so— so very right for an anther."

The door shut. It was as though Gloria Tonnencourt had never been there.

How could it be so easy? Alice's hand trembled as Kelsey moved toward her. With Gloria it had been so quick, happening so fast, over so easily.

"Regular girl," Kelsey was saying. "What wonderful warmth and understanding."

"She's sweet," Alice heard herself saying. But that wasn't true. She only felt that Gloria had been sad. If it had been sweet it was bitter-sweet sadness. But Alice had to forget about Gloria. Gloria was gone. It was like she had never been here at all, as though all those evenings of love had never been. Switch it on, switch it off.

It was like Tevee, she thought, like Tevee—

Kelsey asked her to sit down on the couch, and then he was sitting near her, nearer to her. Then he was touching her, his face inches from hers.

"It seems I've known you for years and years," he said.

And then she was forgetting everything else but Kelsey. It was easy, so easy when you looked and felt right. So easy and she didn't want to think about anything else but Kelsey, dear, sweet, darling Kelsey.

She received him in her arms, with a wild desire, a wild hunger to cover his face with kisses. She felt the intensity taking hold of her, gripping her body, quickening the pounding throb of machinery that was hidden now, hidden away deep and silent and beating now like a human heart.

She kissed his cheek. Her lips strayed over his skin. Her lips glided over his face, felt the moist trembling of his lips.

She felt his trembling, his shuddering sigh, the way his arms convulsed and gripped her, and then she saw the unsettled look, the light in his eyes as he clung to her and at the same time seemed to push her away.

He was frightened. He was trembling, and he was afraid, and his face was flushed.

"What's the matter, darling?" she whispered.

HE STARED at her. His lips were trembling. "I—I don't know. What is it? It was never like this."

"What was never like this?"

"Love—I mean—you—what is it?"

"Real. It's real, darling Kelsey. That's the difference, isn't it?"

"Real?" His face had an uncomprehending look, the cheek muscles trembling as he spoke, his voice hollow and frightened. "Something," he whispered. "What is it? I've never felt anything like it. It—it's too much, maybe. Too much or something—I don't know—"

His face was white. He was sliding away from her.

Already I am losing him, she thought. He's going away. Somehow he senses what is wrong, without knowing what it is he knows. In spite of the beautiful surface, he senses that I am not real, not human, not a being at all.

"No, please," she whispered.

She moved desperately and clutched at him and held him tightly, shocked at his stiffness now, his reluctance, his trembling. She felt tears inside, though they could never show. "Please, please," she whispered.

His voice was shaking. "Listen—it's too much. You scare me. Wait a minute now, let's talk about this. I want to know—"

"How can you be scared of love?"

"Love? This isn't love. It's—it's like anger. It's—I've never known anything like this!"

"Let yourself know. Please."

He closed his eyes. His lips trembled. "I—I felt like I was going to die," he whispered.

Suddenly he turned and stared at the Tevee.

He knows, she thought dully. He knows I'm what I am underneath. But he doesn't know that he knows. He can't admit what seems impossible.

He gasped. His body jerked. She looked at the Tevee frame. There was nothing on it suddenly but a frightening, wavering, milky emptiness.

And a voice; a voice without a face.

"Due to the possibility of an immediate air-raid, Tevee is dead. All transportation is stopped. Those of you who were thoughtful and cooperative enough with your sponsor to order our emergency entertainment projectors will now turn them on. It will greatly decrease anxiety. Red-out regulations will be in effect for two hours."

Kelsey's face was gray. "Air-raid," he whispered. "It's here. It's really here!"

"It's all right, darling." She touched his arm. "It's all right—"

The light went out.

Somewhere Alice heard screaming. It seemed to fill the walls, the floor, the ceiling and the night itself, everywhere, as though the very air was screaming in some vast agony. The sirens.

She heard a whimpering sound and realized that it was Kelsey. She held him tightly in her arms. He was shivering.

The Tevee screen seemed like a page on which vital print had died, something

strangely alive hut without sound or meaning, like an exposed hrain without thought, like the deadness of an open eye in a corpse.

"All lights will be extinguished for two hours," the voice said. "Everyone will go immediately to their air-raid shelters!"

"Two hours," Kelsey whispered.

"I'm here," she said. "We're together, darling. There's nothing—"

He didn't seem to hear her. He leaped out of her arms, and she heard furniture crashing as he hlundered around wildly in the dark.

"The shelter," he yelled hoarsely. "The shelter!"

She followed him unerringly in the dark, to the stairs, without stumhling. When she found him at the bottom of the stairs in the tunnel leading to the private air-raid shelter, he was whimpering and shivering violently.

"Two hours—two hours—two hours—" he whispered, over and over.

She could tell hy the way he said it that it meant something else to him, not two hours, but something infinitely longer, unendurably longer, some kind of awful forever.

She helped him into the shelter and closed the thick door. She couldn't understand that kind of loneliness. She had stood in the black lonely closet for years. She had worked alone. She could understand the loneliness of heing without love. But this fear of his—it had no meaning for her.

And as she looked at Kelsey cowering in the corner of the shelter, she realized something else—Kelsey himself had very little meaning. He was not what he had seemed. He was empty. He was hollow. He wasn't quite real. That was what his fear was; a fear of discovering he had nothing inside; a horror of the ahsence of something you could create inside yourself only hy heing alone.

Alice knew that now. Maybe she had always known it, but now she admitted it to herself.

The shelter was a small square room lined with concrete and lead and steel. There was a large supply of food, and a method of reprocessing the air. A person could live in it for a long time. Alice knew she could. She would have loved being there just with Kelsey, but Kelsey was empty, and there was no way he could give her back her love, nothing in him he could use to share loneliness with her.

"Two hours—"

"But I love you," she said weakly. "We have one another. We can talk. We can tell one another all about—"

"No Tevee," Kelsey whispered. "We can't get out! No one can get in! Two hours!"

The screaming was in the shelter walls. It quivered in the floor and ceiling and walls. But there was really no sound. Nothing could penetrate here; no sound or light. Kelsey looked around the small enclosure. "It may be longer—"

"It's only a warning," Alice said. "There may not he a real air-raid at all."

"Talk!" he suddenly screamed at her. "Let's talk! Talk to me—"

But the superficial things slipped away and she couldn't rememher any of them. She wanted to take him in her arms, but she couldn't do that now hecause it wasn't real. She couldn't talk about all those meaningless things. Mayhe now nothing would be enough to satisfy Kelsey's hollow fear.

WITH GLORIA, with all of them, Alice knew that Kelsey had always heen alone. More alone, more horrihly alone, than she had ever heen. For Kelsey had nothing inside of him to keep him company, or to sincerely share with another.

He had no love in him.

She tried to comfort him, but he was on his knees, shivering and whimpering. Then he tried to heat his way out through the door. She pulled him hack and he fell sohbing on the floor, squirming and rubhing his hands and his face into the floor as though to get some feeling of life from it.

The tremhling of the walls and floor continued, very gently as though even that was somehow being polite, as though even that was trying to make things not so discomforting.

Kelsey was whining and sohhing. "I've got to get out—get out. There's a shelter—a communal shelter. The project place—people—lots of people—"

"All right," she said. "Let's take a chance, if you want to. We'll go to that other shelter—with people in it."

But when they got to the top of the stairs

and stepped into the living room, the lights went on, the Tevee came to color-sound-life again.

The air-raid warning was over.

A smiling face materialized out of the wavery lines.

"The threat of the air-raid is over. Due to our wonderful cooperative spirit, the enemy's cowardly attack accomplished little except the minor destruction of a few scattered points. We're sure now that anyone who has not ordered our Cozy-Corner Air-Raid Shelter will do so without further delay! It comes equipped, remember, with three-dimensional Tevee. There is the illusion of real people—"

Over fifty million air-raid shelters were sold within an hour.

But Alice wasn't concerned about that. She gave Kelsey a sedative and put him to bed, and then she went to her dark closet and stood in it until Wednesday morning. She had time to think about things, and a wonderful calm came over her, and she knew she didn't care what happened to her now. She was strong enough to live alone, and take whatever was coming to her without fear.

When she shook Kelsey awake Wednesday morning and told him she was Alice, he laughed, shocked and incredulous, trying to appear amused. But she told him about the order blank, and convinced him she really was Alice and Anita Starre did not exist.

He ran and called a robot repair clinic. He was almost incoherent, trying to tell the clinic what had happened, but they finally understood and said they would be right out to take the domestic away.

He seemed frightened as he looked at her.

"I don't understand," he said several times. "No one told you to do such a thing. How could a robot just up and do such a thing?"

She started to answer, but didn't. There was nothing to say.

"Robots can become inefficient," Kelsey said. "They can wear down a little and have to be repaired. But how could a robot just up and do a thing like this?"

Because of loneliness and the need for love? She smiled. She could smile now. It would have been funny for her to have said such a thing as that.

She didn't care. She heard the jet-truck drop down by the curb outside Kelsey's house. She heard the footsteps coming up the walk, onto the porch. But she didn't care. She was strong enough not to care at all.

She cared not at all for any of them, Master Kelsey included. She cared a little for Julian, for he had understood a little. But she didn't care about any of the others now. They hardly existed! They had nothing! In them, everything had been frozen forever and nothing really moved inside.

They were empty, they were nothing. they didn't exist!

You saw the bright surfaces and the smiles as they walked and talked on the street, and for a while you wanted to believe they existed, that they were there. But they weren't really there at all.

She smiled and stood still and waited for them to move toward her. They seemed afraid of her.

There's nothing to be afraid of, not here, not in me, she wanted to say. It's in you that the fear is, for what is more frightening than emptiness and the feel of hollow time going by?

At least she had the joy of knowing she had been alive.

The hand turned off her thermostat.

●

Look Forward to—

THE GLOB

Another Brilliant Story

By BRYCE WALTON

COMING NEXT ISSUE!

Illustration by KELLY FREAS

It took a trip in time to make a man of Mikel. . . .

Time Out for Redheads

By MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

HIS name was Mikel Skot. He was thirty-four, five-feet-ten and lean, with decent features and all his hair and quite nice brown eyes. But somehow he always seemed to give the impression of being of indeterminate age, and slightly dusty. He lived alone, he gravitated between his job and his lodgings, and since the age of fourteen he had never known a girl well enough to call her by her first name.

For twelve years, ever since 2827, he had sold tickets at one of the windows of Time Travel Tours, Unlimited. If raises hadn't been automatic, he would never have had one, though he was punctual, faithful, honest, quick and accurate. Even the other ticket-sellers still called him Citizen Skot.

He had never budged from his cozy era—even though, as an employee, he was entitled to take any tour he wished, on his semi-annual vacation, at no cost to him beyond the planetary sales tax—nor had he ever left his native city, let alone his native planet. He was too shy even to realize he was lonely.

This morning there was the usual rush. Staggered vacations meant that any time of

the year was the busy season for TTT. Skillfully Mikel Skot arranged tours and calculated rates.

"Two weeks in Rome, 45 B.C.? That will be creds 850, Citizen. You get your costume and equipment in Room 104, right off the Teleport. Yes, I'm sure they'll have a Latin language-transformer you can hire." "England in 1600, one month, reservation in the name of Chas Rusl. Yes, I have it right here. That will be creds 500, please." "You mean you want a ticket for here in Los, for a week six years ago in February? Why, yes, it's a little unusual, but—oh, certainly, I understand—a second honeymoon. Congrats, Citizen—not many couples stay together that long! Just a min, while I look up the rate for two."

The queue seemed endless, and crowds of travelers who already had their tickets were pushing their way through the doors back of the ticket-office to the Teleport itself, together with the friends who were seeing them off. If Mikel had had a moment to spare, which he hadn't, he might have wondered, as so often before, at the numbers of people everybody except himself seemed to know.

The morning wore on, and he was beginning to think longingly of 13:30 o'clock, when his lunchtime relief would arrive and he could sit in a quiet corner of an Autocaf and watch the tridimens screen for the day's news while he ate his favorite vitatabs and smoked a healthcig.

Then everything happened all at once.

The girl standing at his ticket-window was a redhead. Her eyes were green, with little dancing amber lights in them, and she smiled at him as if he were the kind of man girls do smile at, and not ineffectual Mikel Skot.

"Can you tell me," she began, in a warm, slightly husky voice.

Then she screamed loudly and collapsed.

THERE were shouts and jostling and milling around, and somebody leaned over the counter and abruptly thrust something into his hand. He stood there dazed, grabbing the object, whatever it was. Then he leaned over the counter. The girl was lying there, very still. On one side of her a pool of blood was slowly forming on the floor.

The guards were coming from all directions, trying to get some kind of quiet and order into the excited throng. Mikel looked down at the thing in his hand.

It was a knife, a steel knife with a wooden handle. It was obviously an antique, and of great value. And it was smeared with fresh blood.

Mikel Skot lost his head entirely. Never before had he, or anyone he had ever heard of, been involved even remotely in any kind of violence. He never even took in historical crime plays. The redheaded girl was dead, and he held in his hand the knife that had killed her. And she had been the first girl who had smiled at him for years.

He wanted out—now!

He reached behind him and grabbed a ticket at random, not even looking to see what date it was. He punched it hastily for a week. Nobody was looking at him; everybody was still yelling at everybody else, and the sweating guards were trying to line people up and blocking the doors so that they could not get away. Mikel ran to the corridor back of the counters, which the ticket-sellers used, and saw that the company door to the Teleport was open. Out there, what with parties singing "Happy Timetrav to You," or noisily greeting homecomers, and the loudspeaker directing passengers to their proper stations, and the roar of the take-offs and returnjets, nobody seemed to have noticed that anything was wrong in the ticket-office.

Mikel glanced around once to be sure that nobody was watching him, and slipped through the door. He was still holding the knife. Automatically he thrust it into his belt-pouch.

It was typical of him that after twelve years not one of the Teleport attendants knew him by sight. He thrust his ticket at the nearest one. The man glanced at it (three other travelers were trying to get his attention at the same time) and said "Platform Eight." Mikel hurried there.

Before he reached it he remembered something. He had punched the ticket for duration, but not for place. Well, that was all right. If it had no place-punch, it would mean Los itself. He was escaping into his own city.

The attendant at Eight took his ticket,

then peered at him dubiously.

"You haven't clothes for the period, Citizen. Go to Room 104 and—"

"It doesn't matter," Mikel interrupted him. He was in a fever to be gone. "I'm—it's a research project," he added in a sudden inspiration which didn't make sense even to himself, but which the attendant, used to strange statements from travelers, accepted without comment. He sealed the timeporter on to Mikel's wrist, set it for return in a week, and helped him into the telechamber.

There was a swift moment when his head felt empty and his stomach heaved: and Mikel Skot found himself sitting on an iron bench in a park.

He had a week now to think things over. He was in Los—he had to be, his ticket said so.

But when?

He looked about him. It must be the middle of the day, the same time it had been before, and the park was full of people on their lunch-hour. They were dressed weirdly—the men and half the women wore tight cylindrical garments, one on each leg. The upper part of their bodies were covered with various kinds of brightly-colored cloth, though occasionally he saw a woman who wore only a breast-holder above her bare midriff! Mikel, in his belted tunic, huddled in a corner of his bench, fearful of notice. But nobody paid any attention to him, and once a man passed who had on a tunic too—a long white one, over bare feet and under long hair and a flowing beard. Apparently in this period people dressed as they pleased—at least in Los.

The city itself, what part of it he could see from his vantage-point, was stranger than the people. There were no moving sidewalks, and no weather-canopies over the streets—though perhaps these had only been removed for the dry season. The buildings looked shrunken and tiny—hardly one seemed to be more than thirty or forty stories high. Archaic buses and motor-cars, apparently powered by some non-atomic fuel, plied the actual streets, instead of being confined to subways. The skies were almost empty of planes, and those he saw were incredibly clumsy and slow. There was obviously no freeway for helicopters.

IT WAS self-evident that he was in some year of the remote past, though just which, he had no idea. He wished he had taken time to glance at the ticket before he handed it in. He wished he had studied history komikbooks, or given more than a cursory glance at the telescreen propinforms of TTT. There was something to be said, after all, for the General Educationalists, cranks as they were.

Certainly this was not his Los—his giant city stretching from Mex to Sanfran without a break. This was a little place of probably not much more than two million inhabitants. Well, here he was for a week, and he'd better find out how he was going to eat and sleep. Properly equipped time travelers had money of the right period, but the cred checks in his pouch would do him no good now. What did he have on him that could be exchanged for board and lodging?

Only one object of undoubted value. The knife.

Surreptitiously and with distaste he took it out and looked at it. The blood had dried on it and doubtless left traces on the lining of his pouch. It was probably covered with the fingerprints of the murderer as well as with his own. But it was all he had.

In the middle of the park there was a fountain, with a pool around it. Casually Mikel Skot strolled over to it and sat down on the ledge. When he was sure nobody was looking he dipped the knife in the water and scrubbed it dry on the inner hem of his tunic. There would still be traces of blood which any chemist could find, of course; but nobody here would be examining it for that. Since anyone could see that it was of immense value, he would have to account for possession of it. He could say it was an heirloom.

Putting it back in his pouch he approached a fat man on a bench nearby.

"Where is the nearest history museum, please, Citizen?" he asked politely.

The man looked up. He had been scanning a large piece of paper which Mikel, with a thrill, recognized from one of his few visits to the Museum of Antiquities. It was a thing called a newspaper, which had antedated the tridimens telescreen. He remembered that the specimens he had seen had borne dates at the top, and if he could

read the archaic printing he could find out what year it was. But the man folded it up and thrust it under his arms as he answered.

"History museum?" he echoed. "Gosh, bud, I don't know. I'm a stranger here myself—just got in from Kansas yesterday. You a foreigner?" he asked with frank curiosity. "You got a funny accent. And you sure look funny."

A foreigner—that was a good one! But Mikel had no time to waste. He murmured "Excuse," and left. The man stared after him and made a gesture which Mikel did not understand—describing a circle in the air near his forehead.

Mikel walked to the edge of the little park and looked about him. Across the street was a store with newspapers in racks in front of it. He could go over there and see the dates. But what did it really matter? With his ignorance of all but the haziest generalities of history—he thought that once, thousands of years ago, Los had belonged to the Spaniards, and after that there was some kind of war that was maybe called the American Revolution or the Civil War or the World War, he was not sure which—it wouldn't do him much good to know whether he was in, say, 1820 or 1960 or 2080. Besides, he was afraid to cross that street full of clumsy vehicles, and with neither an overpass nor an underpass. Nowhere could he see anything that resembled a museum.

FARTHER down on the same side of the street on which he stood, he saw something that looked faintly promising. He walked down to it, and found a window full of odd-looking primitive objects, the nature of some of which he could not guess. But there were knives among them, and a sign said, in ancient spelling, "Jewelry Bought and Sold." On an impulse he walked in.

A man in another queer garment—some kind of cloth upper, with a white linen thing beneath it and a ribbon tied around his neck—looked up without surprise at Mikel's literally untimely garb, and said: "Yes, sir?"

Mikel drew out the knife.

"Very valuable," he said. "An heirloom. How much will you give me?"

The man shrank back, not as if he were afraid of the knife, but as if he were suddenly afraid of Mikel.

"You kidding me?" he asked. "Or is this a stick-up?"

Mikel was not sure what the words meant, so he merely shook his head.

"Then are you nuts? There's nothing valuable about that thing. It's just an ordinary kitchen knife."

"Not valuable?" Mikel's face fell. "But look—wooden handle, steel blade."

"So what? Every knife has a wooden handle and a steel blade."

"You will not give me money for it?"

"Of course not. We don't buy junk."

There was no use arguing. One age's antique is another age's junk. Mikel sighed and departed quietly. How was he to get food and shelter for a week?

He went back to the park and sat down again on a bench. He put the knife back in his pouch.

This was what came of panicking for the first time in his humdrum life. A sudden image of the redheaded girl came before his mind—her green eyes and her smile. That girl—she was so pretty—and she had smiled at him, whom girls never noticed. And then she had been killed. Now that it was too late, he wished he had stayed, whatever might have happened to him. He wanted to help, to avenge her; he wanted to be home again.

His stomach reminded him sharply that he had had no lunch. He had never heard how long a man could go without eating. Could he even live through the week?

He sat there disconsolately, his eyes fixed on the ground. On his wrist was sealed the little gadget that was his only means of ever seeing 2839 again.

Somebody came and sat down beside him. Deep in thought, he did not even glance up. A voice said, "Can you tell me what time it is? My watch is broken and there's no clock around here."

"Watch"—that meant "to be alert." "Clock"—that was an ancient time-measuring device, he thought. The only way Mikel knew to tell the time was to glance at the ceiling of any room, or if he were outdoors to tune in on his miniature tridimens gadget, attached to his belt. He dialed it now, but there was no response. Of course not—it wouldn't work across per-

haps a thousand years.

"I'm sorry," he answered. "I can't."

He turned as he spoke. He jumped violently.

The speaker was a girl. She had red hair and green eyes. Otherwise there was no resemblance, though she too was pretty. But red hair and green eyes seemed to be haunting him.

"What's that thing on your left wrist, then?" asked the girl spunkily.

MIKEL reddened. Rule Five of the booklets he handed out with the tickets to all travelers leaped into his mind: "Remember, you cannot change the course of history. To avoid confusion and difficulty, avoid revealing to any person you meet in other time-periods the true nature of your presence there."

He broke the rule, and was sorry at once.

"It's a timeporter," he said, "set for my return home."

The girl laughed.

"That's a good one. I thought I'd heard everything since I came to this crazy place. What are you, an Arab, dressed in that tablecloth?"

"I was born right here in Los," Mikel announced with dignity. "I've always lived here."

"So they grow them crazy here right from the start! Then where's your home you're 'set' to return to?"

"Here in Los."

The girl stood up hastily, a look of alarm on her face.

"Oh, please," Mikel cried, "don't go. I can explain. Perhaps you can help me."

She sat down again duhiously.

"Well, I'm a sucker for a good story," she said. "Shoot."

"I—I wouldn't shoot. I have no weapon."

That wasn't true—he did have a weapon: the knife. But he could hardly mention that. Anyway, the girl only laughed again.

"Wisecracks, yet," she said unintelligibly. "Well, what's the story?"

"I am from this place, but I am not from your time," Mikel began laboriously; he was utterly unaccustomed to social conversation with a woman. "I am from—with me it is 2839."

"What in the—look, what are you advertising? Some science fiction magazine?"

"I don't understand that word—adver—what is it? Please believe me. I shouldn't tell you, I'm breaking a rule. But it is true."

"Go on." She fixed him with a skeptical glance.

"I was—I am a ticket-seller for Time Travel Tours. This morning—I mean what was to me this morning—a customer was killed at my window."

He plunged ahead. She listeoed in silence, a peculiar expression in her eyes.

"So you see," he concluded, "I am here for a week. But then I go back—the timeporter will see to that. I *want* to go—I'm sorry I ran away. But I'm sure the police will say I did it, because of the knife."

"Let's see it."

He brought it out.

"Why, that's just an ordinary kitcheo carving knife," she said, just as the man in the store had done. "I suppose you *would* call it an antique in—what was it?—2839. I still say you're haywire—or else this is some new racket I don't get."

"I don't understand."

"Okay, I guess you wouldn't—in 2839. The language would change plenty in 886 years." Once more her laugh rang out. "I'll say you keep it up fine—that funny half-foreign way you pronounce your words. But I'll play along, and pretend this is all on the up-and-up. Even so, it's haywire—crazy. Because the dumbest cop in the world wouldn't suspect you of the murder. Anybody'd know the murderer just got rid of the knife the quickest way he could. Gosh, you were behind your window, weren't you, and she was in front of it? Where was her stab wound?"

"Wait—it's hard for me to understand. 'Cop'—is that slang for police? And the blood"—he shuddered—"came from her side. Either someone in front or someone behind her could have done it."

"But they'll find out right away, won't they, that you didn't know the girl? They'll find out who she was, and they'll grill everybody she knew, to see who had a reason for wanting her out of the way. . . . Listen to me! I'm as big a nut as you are. I'm talking just as if the whole thing really happened."

"It did happen," Mikel assured her

earnestly. "No, I didn't know her. I don't know any girls at all. I'm—I'm not attractive to women."

"Why, you're not so bad," said the girl kindly. "I think you're kind of cute—or would be, if you weren't rigged up in those outlandish clothes," she paused, then continued, "Well, if you can prove you didn't know her, what have you got to worry about?"

"The knife. And that I lost my head and ran."

THE girl nodded. "Leave the knife here, then. Or would that change the course of history?" She smiled. "Of course, what you ought to have done was hand it right over. Then if it was such a great antique they'd not only have the guy's fingerprints but they'd also find out who knew her that worked in a museum or had a chance to steal it from one. That's elementary homicide procedure."

"You see," said Mikel, "this also you won't believe. But our police are not conditioned to take care of killings. This is the first time in my whole life that I have ever even heard of one, except by accident. The psychologists wouldn't allow anyone to grow up who had murderous tendencies that couldn't be sublimated."

"They let that one slip by them, didn't they? And do you mean that in the great scientific future they tell us about, the police won't know as much about handling a homicide case as any hick constable knows today? Who're you trying to kid?"

"We do not have crime. The police are to guard traffic and to take up for reconditioning anybody who doesn't obey the civil rules. I don't know much history, but I know there once were wars, and then there were experts in war. Now—in my time—we have no wars, so there are no experts. In the same way we have no experts in crime."

"Then what would they do to you, if they did convict you of this murder you didn't commit?"

"I don't know. There is no penalty for murder because there have been no murders for so long. This will be a world affair; the police will refer it to the Supreme Council, and they will decide what to do. I suppose they will have me euthanized as an atavistic deviant. That's why I lost my head. It was a totally new experience and I haven't been conditioned to new experiences. But even if they don't convict me, they'll punish me for running away. They'll demote me, perhaps all the way back to where I started twelve years ago."

"It doesn't sound like much of a brave new world to me," said the girl in a disparaging tone. "What's your name—or do you just have numbers?"

"My name is Mikel Skot."

"Michael Scott—well, that sounds like a regular name, anyway. Mine's Betty French, by the way."

"Many grats to you, Citizen French. You have given me good advice. I know now it is my duty to take the knife back with me, and give it to the police. I shall tell them also about looking for somebody in a museum, as you suggested. But there will be no fingerprints—I washed the knife in that fountain, when I hoped to sell it. I forgot it *must* exist in my era, or the murder could not have occurred.

"But that is not my big problem now. I have no money of your time. How shall I live until I can go home?"

BETTY FRENCH seemed to stiffen. She looked at him disgustedly. "I get it now," she said. "I might have known. This is just a new way of panhandling. I certainly admire it—it's a work of art. Well, I got my money's worth. I'll pay for it."

She opened her handbag, drew out a dollar bill, and laid it on Mikel's knee. He gazed at it curiously, but made no attempt to pick it up.

"Is that your kind of money?" he asked. "What do I do in exchange for it?"

"Oh, let's drop it," she sighed wearily. "My lunch-hour's up, anyway. Take it—it'll buy you a hamburger and coffee, and then you can tell your tale to the next comer and maybe get enough for a bed in a flophouse. Brother, you must have told it plenty, to get it all down so pat. It's a wonder I've missed you before—or are you just starting to work this neighborhood?"

She snapped her bag shut and stood up.

"Please—I don't understand—why are you so angry?"

At the desperation in his voice she turned and stopped.

"Look—I really have to get back to the office. This *is* an act, isn't it? Come clean—aren't you panhandling?"

"What does 'panhandling' mean?"

"Oh, I give up! I guess you're just looney, after all. All right, Mike, let's call it a day. You keep that buck, and now you just go to the nearest police station and tell them your story. They'll take you over to the psychiatric ward of the county hospital and you can get free board and lodging there."

Mikel turned pale and shivered.

"Oh, no," he breathed. "I'm not insane. If you don't believe me, no one else will. And the hospital will euthanize me."

"Is that what they do to crazy people in—in your time?"

"Of course. And they punish the psychologist who didn't detect the tendency and have the person euthanized in childhood."

"Suppose I give you my word they won't do that to you here and now? They'll just observe you for a few days and then they'll have you committeed to a state hospital."

"You are quite positive? If I can be sure of being alive a week from now, no matter where I am, when the timeporter checks I'll go back home."

"Even if you're in a padded cell?"

"It won't matter where."

"Well, then, your problem's solved, isn't it? I'll show you how to get to the station."

"I must eat first. I'm very hungry. And what were those things you said if I should get—hamburger and coffee? They are—original foods? Our food is all synthetic."

"You don't have to keep this up with me any more. There's a quick lunch place." She pointed.

"And they won't mind in this Autocaf that I'm not dressed like the others?"

"In this burg? They wouldn't notice if you wandered around in a loincloth. Now I've *got* to go. This is the wackiest thing that ever happened to me, whatever it really means. Well, good luck, Mike!"

"Grats to you, Citizen French, from deep in my pineal. Oh, [illegible] first one min[illegible] fetch [illegible] more please!"

"What is it now?" [illegible] her

"You have given me so much to tell our police. But won't they wonder *why* this man killed the girl?"

"They can ask him when they catch them, can't they? But it's perfectly obvious. She was buying a ticket, wasn't she?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, that meant she was going away—leaving him, doesn't it? So he was in love with her—maybe she was his wife—and he couldn't take it. Maybe she was going to some other guy—how do I know? He found out she was deserting him, so he got bold of the knife, and followed her."

"But I don't see why." Mikel was utterly bewildered. "She was a free agent, like anybody else. He couldn't object to her leaving if she no longer loved him—he didn't *own* her. That doesn't make sense. If I tell one of our police *that* theory, she will surely think I'm insane."

"She?"

"All our police are women, of course. Women are naturally gifted at keeping order."

"You tell that to our cops, and they'll surely get you tucked away in a nice hospital, but fast. Well, why else *would* he kill her?"

"I don't know. That's why I asked you—you know so much more about such things, in your barb—in your time."

"Your policewoman will have to figure it out for herself. So long, Mike." She shook her head, smiling. "Will I have a tale to tell the crowd—if they don't decide I've gone nuts myself! Good-by!"

"Goobie, Citizen, and grats again."

Still smiling, she hurried down the path out of the park.

WHEN he could see her no longer, Mikel stood up and began hesitantly to walk toward the restaurant she had pointed out. Fortunately, it was on the same side of the street, not far past the shop where he tried to sell the knife.

This was not going to be plez, not at

all plez. Despite what this Beti French had told him, he was nervous about putting his life in the hands of either the police or psychologist of this barbarous era. But there didn't seem to be anything else he could do. His conversation with the red-headed girl had shown him clearly what kind of reception he would meet from anyone else he ventured to approach.

First he must eat—he was ravenous. He dared not ask for any food except the two things the girl had mentioned, whatever they were like. Presumably the money she had given him would be enough.

The restaurant had a long counter of some white substance, with stools fixed before it. Only one man sat there eating, but behind it stood another man dressed in white, with a white cap on his head. Mikel perched himself on the nearest stool.

"Hamburger, coffee, please," he said, and laid Beti's money beside him on the counter.

The other customer looked up and eyed him sharply, but the man behind the counter merely yelled "One on a bun!" through a hole in the wall. "Mustard?" he asked, "Onions? Cream?"

"No, Citizen. Hamburger, coffee," Mikel repeated, flustered.

"A joker!" the man grunted. "This town! You in the movies, bud?"

Mikel stared.

"He wants a burger without and coffee with," the other customer put in suddenly. He picked up his dishes and slid down to the next stool. He was a heavy-set, middle-aged man, dressed as the man in the store had been—in dark cloth bifurcated leg-coverings and a dark, long-sleeved upper garment over a light-colored undergarment, with a gaudy ribbon around his neck.

"Okay, okay," said the man in white placatingly, and set down before Mikel something on a plate and something else in a cup, both hot. Mikel began sampling them gingerly with the unaccustomed implements. The restaurant man took the money, put it in a box that rang a bell, and laid down some small metal objects in its place. Then he disappeared through a door behind the counter.

Mikel's neighbor waited until he had gone. Then in a low voice he said:

"Finish the food, Citizen Skot. Then we'll talk."

Mikel looked up, frozen. The stranger shot his left wrist out from the sleeve. Sealed to it was a timeporter.

"From TTT executive, Citizen," he said briskly. "I didn't think I'd find you quite so soon, but I knew it wouldn't be long, since you didn't wait to get proper equipment for your journey. It is fort for you that this is perhaps the only place in this era where you would not have been taken up at sight for wandering around in unusual clothing."

"How—how did you know what period—"

"We only had to check the tickets, to see which was missing. Have you the knife?"

MIKEL brought it out dumbly and laid it on the counter. The man put it in a pouch sewed into his lower garment.

"I didn't do it! I didn't!" Mikel cried despairingly. He had lost his appetite completely.

"Sh! We don't want a fuss here. I am rechecking your timeporter, Citizen Skot. We are going back immediately."

"I—I didn't even know the girl!" Mikel pleaded, remembering Beti French's instructions.

"We shall see as to that, when we get home," said the TTT executive grimly.

Then suddenly he burst out laughing. He laugbed until he had to take a small piece of white material from his upper garment and wipe his eyes.

"I meant to give you a good scare, to put some sense into you," he gasped finally. "But I can't keep it up. Citizen Skot, you are a fool."

"I know that, Citizen," said Mikel humbly.

"The psychologists really conditioned you a bit too well. I am told that you live for your work and have no recreation at all. You are as ignorant of the world as a small child. Come, did you ever hear of a murder in our time, anywhere, in all your life?"

"No. But I know such things occur."

"In the past, not in our time. How could there be a murder in our era? In the old times, people killed one another for jeal-

ousy, for revenge, for greed. Such incentives do not exist in the 29th century. The only other possibility would be insanity, and the psychologists would never allow that to proceed to such a point—the diseased person would be euthanized at the very first symptoms."

"But the girl *was* killed, right before my eyes."

"My poor man, you were a victim of your own ridiculously retired existence. Anyone else would have guessed at once. It was planned that way so as to get a good effect of a crowd in confusion—most of them were extras. Of course all the arrangements had been made with us beforehand, and the concealed telcams were focused away from any Time Travel signs."

"Telecams?"

"World Theater was making a historical crime tridimens in modern dress, Citizen Skot. The girl was an actress. The blood was faked. They thought it would be more effective not to put an actor behind the ticket-window, but to use a real ticket-seller without warning him, just as part of the crowd wasn't warned. It worked beautifully—they tell me your fright and horror showed up wonderfully well.

"They picked your window because they said they liked your looks—I can't imagine why. That was their big mistake. Any other of our ticket-sellers would have waited to see what happened next. You. you dumble, fell into a panic and ran away. And I've had to leave my desk in the middle of a busy aftern to go and fetch you We couldn't let you wander around here for a week without means of subsistence, and thinking you were suspected of murder!"

"I suppose I'll be demoted now," Mikel said gloomily.

"That wouldn't be fair. This wasn't one of the known responsibilities of your position. No, but I imagine you'll come in for a lot of whiffing, to use a slang expression."

"Kidding—that's what they call it here, I think. Well, I'm used to that."

"And Dafne Dart says she's wild to meet you."

"Dafne Dart? Who's she?" Mikel looked alarmed again.

"Your performance made a tremend impression on her. She told me to tell you she thinks 'you're purely vlumpish.' She's the actress who played the murder victim."

"That red-haired girl with the green eyes with flecks of amber in them?" asked Mikel eagerly. "With the streely smile and the gorge voice?"

"You seem to bave noticed her," said the TTT executive dryly. "Yes, that's the one. I thought you didn't go for women."

"But that's different!" Mikel Skot caroled. "Redheads with green eyes—that's the one kind that crashes me and that I crash—I just found it out today.

"Come on, Citizen, what are we waiting for? Let's Go!"

THE HOT SPOT

SCIENTISTS taking part in the International Geophysical Year (1957-1958) will seek the answer to why the Earth has warmed up 2.2 degrees in the past fifty years. Special consideration will be paid to what is happening in the Antarctic. If this vast continent, the world's higgest "icehox," is defrosting inland as it is near the coast, then scientists will know that the warm-up covers the entire world. If the ice pack is melting on a gigantic scale, as the temperatnre rise indicates, onr very lives will change. If just one percent of the arctic ice-shelf melts, the sea level around the world will rise from eight to *thirty* inches. If eight or ten percent should melt—well, boys, start developing gills!

—H. D. K.

Illustration by PAUL ORBAN

The Rogue Waveform

By R. W. STOCKHEKER

Freddy the wrestler was only happy when everybody hated him, and when hate changed to love— he was miserable!

THE way it started, Leo Stern decided I should make a publicity appearance at this soiree up in Bel Air. I wasn't happy about the deal. These Bel Air soirees are usually loaded with earnest intellectuals, and if there's one thing that upsets me it's mingling with

earnest intellectuals. But Leo is my manager. What he decides I should do, I do.

"Being seen at this brain brawl will be smart box office, Freddy," Leo told me. "You can use a little high-brow publicity."

I could have used a little premonition and second sight too. It would have kept me from getting mixed up with Panda, the beautiful Ph.D. It would have kept me from taking that fatal fall to Dr. Stanley MacCluett's synthetic symbiotic wave. I could have gone on for the rest of my life being the same old obnoxious Freddy Booten.

That's my legal name — Freddy Booten. Professionally I am known as Don Diablo. This is because I am supposed to look very sinister. I have basilisk black eyes, a satanic-type Vandyke and I am all over with muscle. I am what is very loosely termed a wrestler.

Very, very loosely. On any given day you can pick up at least a hundred heavies around and about the country who can easily whip me no hands. The reason they consistently refrain from doing this is merely because promoters dearly love to amass money. Time and time again cash customers will come back to the arena in the hopes of seeing some clean-cut American kid twist me up like a cruller.

This never happens, of course. What happens is I leave the clean-cut American kid writhing in frightful agony on the canvas. Sneering horribly, a red nylon robe tossed rakishly around my shoulders, I make my victory strut up the aisle. While I strut and sneer, kindly old ladies try to beat me to death with their canes. I am indeed a very obnoxious character.

Being obnoxious never bothered me. It was, I always figured, a fast way to stack a buck on top of a buck. In a year or two, if some kindly old lady didn't maim me first, I'd have enough to retire to my pig farm back in Fishhook, Illinois. I'm proud of that pig farm. People may detest me, but I get along fine with pigs. We're real compatible.

THE party Leo picked out for me to attend that night was being held in one of those mansions which come equipped with their own private mountain. It was jammed clear to the upstairs maid with artists, swamis and people, and I was prepared to have a very dull night. What I wasn't prepared for was to meet Panda.

At the time, I didn't know that's who she was. All I knew was suddenly here was this spectacular girl with the glossy white streak in her satin black hair standing in front of me. She had an orange juice and vodka in one hand and an expression of mild revulsion on her beautiful face.

"I can tell by that silly beard you're a male," she snarled. "But a male what?"

Then she reached up and dumped the orange juice and vodka over me.

It wasn't anything to get sore about. Lots of women throw drinks at me. I'm used to it by now. When it happens, I merely draw myself up to my full six-feet-four and drip disdainfully down on the drink-tosser. Then I stalk away. If there's a photographer around, I pause and lash my beard a couple of times for the camera. It is, Leo says, very smart box office.

It wasn't anything to get sore about, but that's what I did. Something sputtered in my head and I broke out in flame. Without even bothering to clear it with my conscience I lifted a foot and planted it on the girl's instep. Not hard enough to break any bones, you understand; just enough pressure to cause her to shriek in mortal anguish.

That shriek got a rousing reaction. Those earnest intellectuals suddenly came boiling toward me in a red wave of wrath. There was a scrawny blonde, built like the ruins of Pompeii, in the lead.

"Let me have him, girls!" I heard that scrawny blonde whinny. "Ten years ago I took some jujutsu lessons to help protect me from men. Now I want to see if I wasted my money."

I guess she never did find out if she wasted her money. Before she could get her girlish talons into me some lily-livered flunky pulled the main light switch.

In the thick darkness I barreled my

way through the screaming mob. I didn't stop until I climbed into my car. Somebody plopped down into the seat beside me just as I hit the starter.

"Better roll it out of here fast!" a girl's voice yipped excitedly in my ear. "There's a berserk gorilla loose in there!"

I wanted to explain that the berserk gorilla wasn't loose in there any more. I wanted to say, Look, sis, that berserk gorilla is me. But, judging from the way the riot was building up, I just didn't have the time to spare. I rolled out of there fast.

It wasn't until we swung into the lighted boulevard that I realized I had picked up the furious little female with the striped hair.

She recognized me at the same instant. "Yipes!" she squalled. "The bearded Gargantua!" She drew back her foot and aimed a quick kick at my shin. Her open-toed sandal whizzed by my leg and thudded into the dashboard. She grabbed her foot and squalled some more. "Crumpled it up like a balsa kite!" she screeched. "Bones sticking out all over! Stop this chartreuse tumbrel! Let me out of here!"

I stopped the car. The mood she was in I felt she just wasn't safe to have around.

"I don't want to rush you, sis," I said, "but there'll probably be a broom coming along any minute. Maybe if you crawl out fast you can grab a ride home."

She counted up to ten, cooling off faster than a strip-teaser in a drafty igloo.

"This is ridiculous," she sputtered. "Why is it I keep blowing my top like this?"

I was beginning to feel sorry for her. After all, it wasn't her fault I was so obnoxious. "Don't let it throw you," I sighed. "You're merely acting normal. Everybody hates me."

SHE stopped massaging her foot and turned to stare incredulously at me. "Everybody?" she gasped.

I nodded. "Including kindly old ladies and small dogs," I said. I mean, I wasn't boasting or anything. Just trying to paint a clear picture for her.

She thought it over carefully. I could see an idea begin to form in her big brown eyes.

"This is remarkable," she murmured. "This is really remarkable. Mind driving around a bit?"

While I drove around she told me about herself. Her name, she said, was Marsha Carson, though her friends all called her Panda. She worked for the Keevan Research Foundation. Her boss was Dr. Stanley MacCluett, the famous bio-electronicist, who was presently doing some important work on waveform mutuality.

"I have a very good reason for filling you in on all this background material," she went on to explain. "Because of the type of biological electronic research we are carrying on at Keevan I feel I am in an excellent position to offer a logical explanation as to why everybody finds you so detestable."

I told her there wasn't any mystery about that. "I am detestable," I said.

She nodded somberly. "You're an abominable cluck, and that's a mink-lined fact," she agreed. "But this is in no way your fault. You are simply an unfortunate victim of an extreme variation from the electric norm. You have what we bio-electronicists call a rogue symbiotic waveform."

She could be right. Bio-electronics was a little out of my line. I didn't feel I knew enough about the subject to argue.

"What throws me," I said, "is why I should reciprocate your revulsion. I mean, ordinarily I am a sort of good-natured slob. I don't often get mad—not even at kindly old ladies."

It seemed Panda also had a theory about that. "This antagonism undoubtedly stems from the fact that we are at opposite ends of the symbiotic scale," she said. "We are a hundred per cent incompatible."

We drove around for a couple of hours before I dropped her off at her apartment in Santa Monica. When I finally left, I found I was committed to escorting her down to Long Beach,

where I was wrestling that next night. I wanted that date the way a guy on his way to the electric chair wants to sit down.

The Long Beach match turned out to be one of my best performances. The sight of Panda sitting there in the front row, her face contorted in a livid mask of hatred, was positively inspiring. When I finally made my victor's march up the aisle, the place was a howling bedlam.

Those kindly old ladies were leaping from seat to seat like spindle-legged Tarzans.

Leo was all molars by the time we got back down to the dressing room. "Freddy," he chortled, "tonight you were great. I hear the TV switchboard is jammed with people calling up to swear they will slay you on sight. But slow and painful!"

I told Leo I was happy to learn I was such a success.

"You have never been nastier," he assured me expansively. "It must be that dame with the striped hair who was sitting at ringside. She had a high-tone way of screaming for your blood that was very smart box office. Maybe I should step out and give her a couple of free ducats."

I told Leo he needn't bother. "I don't think Panda wants any free ducats," I said.

He looked surprised. "You mean you are acquainted with this piebald babe, Freddy?"

"She came with me," I admitted glumly. "She's a Ph.D. and she lives in Santa Monica."

"Freddy," he murmured, shaking his head in honest admiration, "sometimes I think you are a much smarter boy than I always figured. What an act your girl put on tonight!"

"She wasn't acting, Leo," I said. "She really hates me."

"Freddy," he groaned, still shaking his head, "sometimes I think maybe you are a much stupider boy than I always figured. You drive this girl up Route One-o-one tonight and tomorrow your body will no doubt wash up on the rocks at Redondo."

I WASN'T so sure he wasn't right. I wasn't so sure Panda wasn't prowling around the parking area now, a fire ax in each hand.

As it turned out she was sitting quietly in my car. "You unspeakable beast!" she greeted me when I climbed in. It was the most restrained statement she had made all evening.

On our way up the coast we stopped at a seafood restaurant. In some of these roadside joints you can sometimes pick up a lobster loaded with ptomaine. But either Panda was immune to ptomaine, or else I was just unlucky that night.

It was while we were in the restaurant that Panda made the request that was to ruin my career. "Freddy," she said, squinting thoughtfully at me, "I wonder if you would do me a favor?"

I hesitated. I wanted to be polite, but I wasn't going to cut my throat with any knife. "Favor?" I repeated cautiously.

She nodded. "I wonder if you would stop in at the Keevan Foundation and let Dr. MacCluett type your symbiotic waveform. We may be able to get a waveshape picture of the enmity factor in its pure form. Such a study might lead to the unlocking of the riddle of the antipathy some ethnic groups instinctively hold for others. This might easily turn out to be the dawn of a new era."

Well, as long as she put it that way, I didn't see how I could refuse. I figure if there's one thing this world can use, it's the dawn of a new era.

And so that is how I happened to be at the Keevan Research Foundation early that next evening.

The famous Dr. Stanley MacCluett came as a complete surprise to me. I was expecting a stoop-shouldered old gentleman in bifocals. But he turned out to be about my age and almost as big. He had a granite jaw and brilliant blue eyes that lit up like a pinball machine whenever he glanced at Panda. He seemed to glance at Panda a lot.

The good doctor opened up the proceedings that evening by giving me a rapid-fire briefing on mutuality. He went all the way back to the planarian worms and worked his way up to the

primates. He explained that it was his theory that the pattern of all social behavior was determined by a complicated meshing of symbiotic waves. According to him, these waves held the key to the urge of kind to mate with kind; they were the basis of all physical attraction and all physical antipathy. It was very scientific. I never understood a word.

When he finished the briefing, he led me into a small lab that looked like a cross between the cockpit of a B-39 and an operating room for midgets. There was a big contour chair in the center of the lab.

"Sit in the chair, Freddy," Panda ordered.

I sat in the chair, but I was beginning to get worried.

"Look," I said, narrowing my eyes and steeling my voice, "just in case something goes wrong, I'd like to leave a few words for posterity. I'd like to state that I am proud to—"

"Stop blubbering, Freddy," Panda snapped, giving me a look that would have carved a duck. "This isn't going to hurt."

She was right, Dr. MacCluett said. All they were going to do was use a radio electroencephalograph on me. That radio electroencephalograph was just a series of modified FM transmitters which they were going to set up around me. Those transmitters would pick up my wave patterns and transmit them over to that receiver in the corner. That receiver would flash the pattern to that oscilloscope beside it. I would be as safe as a baby in its mother's arms. Safer even. Those FM transmitters weren't going to drop hot cigarette ashes on me. They weren't going to drip gin in my eyes.

"Just lean back and relax," Dr. MacCluett finished.

I leaned back and tried to relax. Those FM transmitters, I had an idea, were going to have their job cut out for them. That oscilloscope was probably going to turn out to be the blankest oscilloscope in the country.

THE way it is, I'm more familiar with appearing on TV than on radio. I felt lost without a camera pointing at me.

"You want me to suffer a little?" I asked uncertainly. "You want me to lash my beard a few times?"

Dr. MacCluett gave me an unfriendly glance.

For a while I sat there and watched them out of the corners of my eyes. Then I began to get restless again.

"You reading me all right, Dr. MacCluett?" I called.

He didn't bother to answer. Just went on staring at that oscilloscope. "This is remarkable," I heard him mutter. "We must make a photographic record of this. Thus must primitive man's waveform have appeared when he was forced to battle the hairy mammoth."

I decided I ought to put the doctor straight on that point. I didn't want to ruin the start of a new era with any misconceptions.

"Dr. MacCluett, I got to tell you something," I said. "I never battled a hairy mammoth in all my life. Couple of years ago I wrestled a bear in a carnival. But I never laid a finger on a hairy mammoth in all my life."

He didn't bother to comment on that either. He just went on staring and muttering.

I was beginning to build up a back pressure of curiosity. Finally it got to be too much for me. "You mind if I step over and take a peek?" I called out. I mean, those were my brain waves they were looking at. I wanted to be sure they were cleaned up and cleared for transmission.

Panda spun around. "Freddy, don't you dare move!" she yipped. "How can you possibly step over and look at your own brain waves?"

When I thought it over, it didn't seem logical. I guess it would be like climbing a ladder to see the top of your head. I decided it wasn't anything to start a war about.

I don't know what sort of rating I would have picked up on that first show, but I must have impressed Dr. MacCluett. Anyway, he invited me to come back again that next day.

During the following weeks I suppose I must have appeared at the Foundation

at least a dozen times. I was even beginning to draw a small studio audience. Scientists from all over the country came around to stare thoughtfully at me and to ask me probing questions. I don't know, maybe they figured I must have sneaked down from Mars. Any day now I expected the FBI to drop in and ask me where I'd hid my saucer.

On the nights I wasn't wrestling I got in the habit of going places with Panda. She said she wanted to record the reactions of the unwary human horde to my nauseating personality.

As long as I didn't have anything else to do, I didn't mind. But I could tell Dr. MacCluett was beginning to resent these field trips. Couple of times I caught him giving me a sort of measuring stare. It reminded me of the way that bear in the carnival used to look at me—like he wished he could get his muzzle off.

I mentioned this to Panda. "That Dr. MacCluett doesn't like my going out with you so often," I told her. "I'm making him jealous."

She almost broke herself up with girlish glee over that. "Oh, brother!" she shrieked. "How could anybody possibly get jealous of you, Freddy?"

She had a good point. It didn't sound reasonable. "All the same," I insisted, "that Dr. MacCluett is getting jealous."

She told me to stop worrying about it. "I'll handle the good doctor," she said. It was like a kid with a toy blaster telling you he'd handle that armored column.

The very next day the good doctor lowered the boom on me. Panda was lecturing at some woman's club out in Pomona when it happened. I hadn't planned on appearing at the Foundation that afternoon, but Dr. MacCluett called up and asked me if I would stop in. He sounded so genial I decided Panda must have informed him he now loved me like a brother.

FOR once there were no visiting neurologists waiting in the lab. In fact, there was nobody there but Dr. MacCluett.

"Freddy," he said, opening hostilities with a big false smile, "I have one final experiment I would like to perform on you. I've been holding it back to the last because it may be a bit rough."

I asked him how rough did he mean. I said, "I'm wrestling down at the pier tonight, and I can't go on that card with a broken leg. I go on that card with a broken leg and those kindly old ladies will part my head right down the middle."

"This experiment will involve no hazard to limb," he assured me, his smile turning somewhat bleak. "And it may prove to be of great scientific importance."

Well, I thought, as long as it was for Science, I ought to do it. After all, Science has done a lot for me. If it wasn't for Science I'd probably be crouched in a cold cave, gnawing on a raw buffalo. I wanted Science to know I was grateful.

Since my last visit to the Foundation, I noticed the doctor had added another piece of equipment. It was set up beside the contour chair. It looked like one of those analyzers they use in garages to check motor performance. There was a long metal barrel sticking out from it. That barrel pointed directly at my head when I sat down in the chair.

"Dr. MacCluett," I said, "if you've got this gun loaded, maybe you hetter not aim it at my head. I am liable to dull that bullet."

"This instrument is not a gun," he grunted, making a micrometer adjustment. He sighted down the barrel and added, "It's a symbiotic waveshape modifier."

The doctor hadn't been kidding when he said that experiment was going to be rough. One moment I was sitting there, big-wheeling civilization on to the dawn of a new era. The next moment a squadron of jet bombers started roaring through my skull.

Dr. MacCluett was waving a bottle of spirits of ammonia under my nose when I finally opened my eyes.

"You all right, Freddy?" he asked in a quavering voice.

I staggered to my feet. I had a headache that would have dropped an elephant in its tracks. A team of rough

maulers couldn't have done a better job on me with claw holds.

"I'm fine," I groaned, matching him quaver for quaver. "The only reason I look this way is merely because I am dying."

By dint of much heaving and tugging he managed to haul me out to my car and boost me into it.

He appeared as nervous as a neophyte murderer trying to get his first corpse under cover.

"Drive carefully, Freddy," he said, stepping back. He pulled out a white handkerchief and waved it gently. "Look both ways when you cross Wilshire. Please watch out for dangerous pedestrians."

Leo was waiting for me in my dressing room that evening. He gave me an anxious scrutiny. "You feel all right, Freddy?" he inquired solicitously. "You want I should get you an aspirin? You want I should hold a cold cloth on your head?"

I had to look twice to be sure this was Leo talking to me. Any other time I could be lying flat on my face. I could be bleeding out of all my arteries and Leo would probably try to boot me to my feet. "Freddy," he would probably say, "what are you, a hypochondriac?" But here he was, clucking over me like a hen over a newborn egg.

The rest of the evening was strictly a nightmare out of 3-D by Technicolor. I walked down the aisle and there wasn't a single, solitary boo in the place. So help me! There was only this soft, pulsing sigh. Like a steel guitar stuck on Blue Hawaii.

THE pulsing sigh faded to a breathless hush when I climbed through the ropes. Then, suddenly, this kid redhead in shorts and store curves leaped to her feet.

"Oh, you great big beautiful doll, you!" she yipped, waving her popcorn at me.

From then on things got real pitiful. I was supposed to be wrestling a guy named Arnie Kapowsky. Arnie never wrestled any way but hero-style, and the crowd broke his heart that night.

What happened was each time I started to massage Arnie's eyeballs with my thumbs, the crowd whooped with delight. And each time Arnie worked into a hold such as would be perfectly permissible on any dance floor in the country, those kindly old ladies scrambled through the ropes and whanged him with their canes.

Arnie finally terminated this loathsome exhibition by lying down and covering his head with his arms. Either that crowd had to cheer fair or Arnie wasn't going to play.

I don't want to linger any longer on that match. It is something better forgotten by one and all. It is a black and infamous blot, buried now in the pages of wrestling history. Let us leave it there.

Leo waited until we were back in the dressing room before blowing his top. "Freddy," he screeched, "what disgusting thing have you done? Have you rescued some blonde who was going down in the briny deep for the ninth time?"

I told Leo no. "I try to save a blonde from drowning," I said, "and she'll scream high-C for a shark to come and protect her."

"Then have you pulled some tiny toddler out from under the wheels of a careening and malignant truck?" Leo screeched.

I told Leo no. "I try to pull some kid out from under a truck," I said, "and he's liable to bite off my right arm all the way up to my left ear."

"Then how come that crowd was cheering on your side?" Leo howled. "Why were they drooling with affection for you?"

I couldn't explain it. I was completely confused.

If I'd have had a bit more time to think it over I might have been able to figure it out. But it wasn't until this cop brought Panda down to my dressing room that I found out just what had happened.

"Freddy," this cop said, sticking his head in, "there's a young babe with striped hair out here. This young babe is a very excited young babe. She says

she has to see you."

Panda pushed her way in before I could answer. Her face was almost as white as that distinctive streak in her hair.

"Freddy," she squealed, "are you all right?"

I was getting fed up with that question. It just wasn't normal for people to keep asking it. "Of course I'm all right," I snapped.

"But, Freddy," she wailed, "he might have killed you!"

I had to laugh. "You mean Arnie?" I snickered. "Why Arnie wouldn't hurt a fly. Besides, it's against the rules for clean-cut American kids to wrestle rough."

"I mean Dr. MacCluett," she squalled. "That was a very dangerous operation he performed on you. He might have done an irreparable injury to your poor little brain."

In all my life I had never heard such a silly statement.

"Panda, I got to tell you something," I sighed. "Even that bear in that carnival couldn't damage my brain. He beat both paws to a pulp on my head, and then said to hell with it. We used to call that bear 'Old Limpy.' "

She didn't appear to be paying an awful lot of attention to what I was saying. "Dr. MacCluett confessed everything," she went on in a tremulous voice. "He really was jealous of you. So he decided to modify your waveform. He used an ultrasonic beam to perform a sort of transorbital lobotomy and make you lovable."

IT DIDN'T seem like a strictly sensible thing for a smart man like Dr. MacCluett to do. Still, I guess having a high I.Q. doesn't necessarily guarantee a man against being a complete jerk in certain things.

"Why, that poor stupid genius!" I chuckled.

Leo let out a strangled roar. "Freddy," he hellowed, "what is this pinto Ph.D. saying? Is she saying you have let some wacky scientist tamper with your putrid personality?"

That wacky scientist had tampered all right. There wasn't much point in denying it, so I just raised my eyebrows like a furry pair of humpbacked Japanese bridges.

Panda drew a long suddering breath and began to close in on me. "When Dr. MacCluett made that wave shift," she murmured, "he overlooked the fact that there is but a very thin line separating love and hate. He—" She reached up suddenly and slipped her arms around my neck. "Oh-h-h, Fred—dy!" she cooed.

It was a pleasant sensation. I mean, it was a sort of change from having drinks sloshed over you. For a moment there I began to think science was wonderful. I still hadn't had time to realize my career had just gone down in flames. I still didn't know what an appalling experience being a lovable character was going to turn out to be.

I found out. Oh, brother, how I found out!

Twice during the next week Leo arranged matches for me. And twice those kindly old ladies surged through the ropes to protect me.

For awhile I kept hoping my new personality would wear off like a hangover. But it kept getting stronger and stronger. If I ran a stop light, some cop would roar up and apologize for that light's being red. If I stepped into a bar to order a drink, the bartender would beat his forehead in anguish. "Freddy!" he'd scream. "You got to take better care of your stomach! Don't drink that slop I beg you!"

Even my pigs were affected by my new waveform. The time I flew back to Illinois to check on my farm, those pigs chased me clear out of the county. Nipped at my heels and bayed like beagles, those pigs did.

I wasn't too upset about it. I planned on selling the farm anyway. Now that I'm in the diplomatic service, I won't have much time for pig farming. Being the ambassador to Russia is a big job, and I'm worried about it. I don't know whether I'll like having all those Cossacks call me Uncle Freddy. I don't know what I'll do with the Kremlin when they give it to me. ● ● ●

Hot and Happy Bugs

By ALBERT ROSENFELD

Los Alamos science reporter

Meet Zoog, Plutonium-eoter with a radiant personality!

THERE'S no accounting for tastes—and even though they can't account for the the strange taste of one particular member of the bacterial kingdom, the *Zooglea ramigera,* Los Alamos scientists are grateful for it. The bacterium in question, has a sweet tooth for plutonium. Not only can *Zooglea* sop up the stuff like a sot drinking Seagram's, but he doesn't even show signs of a radioactive hangover.

One micromilligram of plutonium in a liter of water (or about one part in a trillion) would be poison for a man—but not for friend Zoog.

Actually, no one knows for sure whether Zoog really eats the plutonium or not. But it's an undeniable fact that be takes it in and hangs onto it. This habit of Zoog's, his hoarding of gamma rays, alpha particles, and the like, fits in very nicely with the plans of Los Alamos engineers who had been trying for some time to find a more suitable method for disposing of radioactive waste from water. Zoog laps it up like a greedy alcoholic.

But how did AEC Engineers John F. Newell and C. W. Christenson find out about Zoog's radioactive feeding habits? And what made them decide to try including some plutonium in Zoog's diet to see whether or not he'd be able to keep the stuff on his infinitesimal tummy—or whatever he uses in place of one? Well, there were three factors involved:

To begin with, it's been known for a long time—especially through the work of bacteriologists like E. R. Buchanan and C. T. Butterfield—that Zoog, when used in various sewage-disposal processes, possessed absorptive, adsorptive, and assimilative characteristics; which is a scientific way of saying that Zoog is a pig—be'll eat anything. Next, scientists knew that the gelatinous mass in which Zoog lives and thrives is high in protein; and there is a great affinity between protein and heavy metals like plutonium. And, finally, it was common knowledge that plutonium tends to be concentrated by algae in streams.

Consequently, the Los Alamos scientists connected with radioactive waste-disposal problems went into a huddle and decided to see if Zoog's appetite would balk at having plutonium added to his menu. Zoog, without turning a hairlet, took it in stride, and it looks like he'll be in steady rations from here on out.

Zoog and all his tiny relatives live on small rocks, about one to four inches in diameter, water-soaked with material which can be used as food. A pile of rocks is set up in a container for use as a trickle filter. Zoog's huge family clusters around the rocks gelatinously, and when the water drips through, the whole clan digs into the radioactive material, and only a very little bit of it gets away.

Of course, plutonium alone could hardly satisfy the hearty appetite of a Zoog; he is also fed regularly on flour, sugar, water, and ammonium phosphate—not to mention a supply of oxygen, without which Zoog would die.

Since Zoog takes in only ninety or ninety-five percent of the plutonium present in radioactive waste water, the water must be trickled through several of the Zoog-filled filters before it can go safely on its

way. And Zoog seems very happy with the set-up, since the supply is as inexhaustible as a Dogpatch ham.

The Zoog earns his keep. For a concrete example of the service he performs, let's take a group of men working around dangerous areas, wearing certain protective clothing. The clothing is "laundered" with decontaminants in water solution. This laundry waste, then, is radioactive. It doesn't contain enough plutonium to make recovery economically feasible, but it does contain more than enough to be dangerous. The plutonium tends to accumulate in the bones, especially in the marrow, if it's taken into the human body. This danger does not worry Zoog because he, like the banana, has no bones.

Formerly, if we took a thousand-gallon sample of this laundry waste, it had to be poured into a huge pit where it soaked through sand and gravel, then more sand and gravel, and finally seeped out into a nearby canyon—which then had to be fenced off. Zoog, however, now makes it possible to let the water go safely on its way, just like any other water. It's true that this system still leaves the problem of the plutonium-laden zoogleal sludge, the "hot bugs," to get rid of, but that is less than two-tenths of one percent of the volume—or two gallons instead of a thousand gallons to worry about. And this two-gallon quantity can be further concentrated, probably to less than a pint, by incineration.

Since it's considered extremely unlikely that Zoog and his breathren—the hottest, happiest set of bugs you'll find anywhere—would ever concentrate plutonium in recoverable quantities, chances are that no bacterial emetic will have to be devised to make them spit it up.

In any case, Zoog seems well on his way to becoming the most radiant personality in the Southwest.

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

are invited to contact the above at the above address. The telephone No.'a listed. Thanx.—*3971 Boone Park Ave., Jacksonville 10, Florida.*

Say, that was a real interesting letter. All that comment and criticism and— You wouldn't happen to have another copy of COLLECTED PORNOGRAPHY around, would yuh?

BLACKBOARD JUNGLE

by Ronald E. Frazier

Dear Editor: I have been a silent fan for a year and a half, but have decided that now is the time to strike at TEV—while the typewriter is hot.

First, a biography: One day, because the rest of my English class did, I wandered into the school library. "Now," said the teacher, "everyone will select a book." The others rushed to the bookshelves, and I sat down in a chair and looked disgusted. The teacher hauled her 290 pounds daintily over to me and said, "Didn't you hear me?"

"I heard you," I said, looking at a blonde on the other side of the room.

"Why don't you get a book, then?" asked the teacher, who could probably win the title of Miss-BEM-of-any-year.

I humored her and went to one of the bookshelves, since the period would soon be over anyway. While staring boredly at the array of hardcovers, something caught my eyes. It was called A TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION, and was edited by something called a Groff Conklin.

I was intrigued. Hmmmm, I thought, maybe it wouldn't hurt to read just one story. I read one. I read two. I read the whole book. I read every anthology in the school library, then every one in the public library. Then, one fateful day, I bought a mag. Then two. Now I buy every one except maybe one or two.

Recently, I have been trying to write stf. But so far I have received nothing but rejection slips.

Now, one or two questions. I read recently in a '52 issue of SS or TWS, I'm not sure which, that Alexander Samalman is not a penname for anyone, but an individual entity. Then, conversely, I read in *Fantasy-Times* that he was a house name for your mags. Which, if either, is true?—*450-42nd St., Richmond, California.*

Sorry to trim your letter, Bob, but fortunes of publishing, you know. As for your question—Alexander Samalman is very real indeed. I'm looking at him at the moment of writing this comment. (Ugh!) He's Senior Editor of all our mags: science fiction, western, mystery and love.

Speaking of love—we loved the following letter!

TWO FOR THE MONEY

by Jim Harmon

Dear Editor: To an experienced hand like you this will probably bring a chuckle, but I had to blink back tears when I saw the cover of the Spring STARTLING STORIES. I hadn't heard about the combination before. Damn it, I grew up on THRILLING WONDER STORIES and spent my allowance on back issues, and I was tickled a rosy shade of pink when FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE came out as the long awaited third pardner of SS and TWS. It may be corn, but it's the truth: it hurt me to see them shrunk down to a sub-title on another old friend, STARTLING.

At least, we have SS left. And while I know "combined with" sub-titles are usually dropped after a few issues, I hope you'll keep those titles up there until maybe by some miracle you can uncombine them into the old magazines once more. I wonder if it would even be possible to use small reproductions of the *logos* of TWS and FSM on the covers. During the war, for a time, FFM and FN were issued in one magazine with both titles full size. I realize you have to have one short dominant title, but it would be nice to see the old title cuts.

And since I believe FSM had the edge on circulation, I *would* like to see the HALL OF FAME revived. It was one of my favorite features in the old SS. The low quantity of reprints made for high quality due to high selectivity.

One thing, though: there is a tradition of editors leveling with their readers in science fiction. It started when Hugo Gernsback admitted that the new paper he was using in AMAZING STORIES was cheaper than the old bulky weave, after going through the regular routine of "going to the expense of getting a new, better type of paper," as a joke. It's been carried on up till the present—Reiss and O'Sullivan admitting that poor sales were forcing them to cut PLANET from a bimonthly to a quarterly. You cut TWS and FSM because you had troubles, not as any noble experiment. Everybody knows that.

There's another tradition: the editor appealing directly to his readers for help. If you won't do this yourself, let me do it in the letter section.

To everyone who loves science fiction (yes, damn it, I mean people who are emotional about it) and who like STARTLING-WONDER-FANTASTIC STORY—if you want to help this fine magazine in the face of a lot of competition from get-rich-quick boys, past and present, buy *two* copies of each issue. One you can read, and keep the other mint. Science fiction magazines become more valuable (to scores of collectors) as time goes by. In a few years those extra copies will be worth 50¢ and in time $1.00. You can

almost always dispose of a science fiction magazine at cover price. If you don't believe me, after one year if you want to sell then, I personally, Jim Harmon, will reclaim an extra copy at cover value from each reader.

That's one way to help SS-TWS-FSM. A second way is to hunt around for it on the newsstands, and if it isn't displayed prominently move it to a good position yourself. Usually, the dealer won't notice or mind. If he says anything or starts to move the stack back, tell him you have a story in the issue and it would be a personal favor to keep it displayed. I've been doing this for almost all science fiction magazines for years and have been called on it only once or twice—*427 East 8th St., Mt. Carmel, Ill.*

Atta boy! We're feeling mighty healthy, and with fans like you, how can we lose? As for The Hall of Fame, we're giving its revival a great deal of thought—but so far there's been no rush of letters indicating public opinion is for it. Perhaps most of the fans want *new* stuff, eh? Let's hear about it. And let's get on to the next letter, which is the "con" to Trina Perlson's "pro."

ANCIENT THEME

by Maston E. James

Dear Editor: Bryce Walton's Story, "Too Late For Eternity," had an ancient theme with a vital emotional style built around it. He is one of the few contemporary pulp fictionists who can really write! This story is horrible because its premise is terrifyingly true That Mr. Walton was able to give this old theme, which applies so definitely today, such emotional appeal, places him in my book as a potential creator of, perhaps, a modern classic which I will cherish to my final day.

I would like to inquire (thus revealing my ignorance) about an authoress whose stories I have not seen in a long time. Could you tell me if C. L. Moore is still writing short stories? It would be nice if your magazine could get hold of one for publication.

I have been reading *Startling Stories* since 1943, though I am not an stf fan, and I hope that I can continue to read it for many a decade to come.—*719 Belmont Place, Seattle 2, Wash.*

Re your comments on *Too Late For Eternity:* so say all the males in this office; and so say (or indicate) the insurance company reports on differences between male and female life-spans. As for C. L. Moore, she is, in private life, the wife of Henry Kuttner, and Henry was up at the office recently. We had a long, interesting talk during which the following facts emerged.

[*Turn page*]

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LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution, Dept. 8329 H, Chicago 5, Ill.

It seems Henry and his wife were recently busy taking post graduate courses at a university (which shall remain unnamed—we forgot, so sue us!) and they've both been giving their all to dear old unnamed-U. However, they're now getting back to the old typewriter and hope to be turning out more fiction again in the near future..

AT WAR WITH THE ARMY
by Thomas C. Pace

Dear Editor: *Name Your Pleasure* fooled me (Winter, Thrilling Wonder). Both good adventure and some carefully-pointed moralizing. It should, at least, make clear to some of your readers that there exists a difference between morals and ethics.

The entire issue was interesting and extremely readable. I especially liked Robert Crane's *The Female.*

Those cartoons are a fine idea. The one on page 69 is about the best stf cartoon I have ever seen. Incidentally, would it be possible to get VIP cartoons?

I liked A. A. Gilliland's view of fans, and I am surprised and pleased that he let me off with praise. And I will freely admit that the Army has powerful inducements to persuade one to change one's ways. However, the Army—or at least the narrow segments of the Infantry and the Signal Corps with which I have come in contact—do a far finer job of temporarily or permanently embittering people than they do of winning them over to the Service as a career and, of course, if their inducements had really sound psychology behind them, this would not be true. I wonder how many potential career NCOs the Army loses after their first hitch because they are fed up with the stupidity, arrogance and pettiness all too many NCOs and officers exercise?

Most of them, in spite of the impression given by the average soldier in conversation, are fairly responsible men, doing their best according to their abilities and backgrounds. These are too often not good enough to get things done efficiently or properly, and then there is always the omnipresent sheer, born, natural, galloping martinet.

And please, don't anyone write and ask me sarcastically how I explain away the fact that we've never lost a war! I haven't any idea, and on reading American History and reflecting on the fact that the Army reputedly hasn't *really* ever changed, my feelings are about half pride and half amazement!

I'd like to ask again for another Jack Vance novelet, or preferably a series of them. And how about moving Marion Zimmer Bradley out of the letter column into the contents column? The girl can write. She and Chad Oliver will eventually be the outstanding former fans in the pro ranks.—*4709A Gateway Terrace, Arbutus, Maryland.*

Tom had some comments to make on religion vs. science, but we feel it's time for new topics to enliven our letter column. And we know you'll all be interested to learn that the sequel to Gunn's *Name Your Pleasure* will be coming up in our next issue. An exciting, thoughtful novel called *The Naked Sky.*

FROM DOWN-UNDER
by P. Smith

Dear Editor: Could you give a plug to the Futurian Society of Sydney (Australia, that is)? We are the second oldest fan club in the world, and have the largest library in the Southern Hemisphere. Members of the club do not have to pay any library fees—imagine, books for nuttin'! We have meetings every Monday and Thursday, with a monthly film night, chess competition, cards, darts, theatre parties and barbecues. We also have members.

I suppose I should say that something stinks about your magazine, but— Ah, yes. Why all the criticism of women in your letter column? Your readers don't like 'em or something? I've heard it takes all kinds to make a world, but as for me, I'm all for the ladies!

If there are any fans who want a penfriend from Down-Under, please feel free to write. Until next time, cheerio, and keep up the good work.—*Box 4440, G.P.O., Sydney, Australia.*

We'd sure like to attend one of those meetings, Smith, but the taxi fare to Australia is a little steep. However, now we know what to do with all the unwanted women in the States—or won't you accept Collect packages?

CHRONIC NON-WRITER
by George Hopkins

Some few meetings back, Imaginations Unlimited voted to have me express our pleasure and thanks for your mentioning the club in the Winter issue of Fantastic Stories. The second paragraph in the Argonaut, our monthly club bulletin, is expressive of the deep appreciation we all feel.

I must ask you to excuse the errors in the bulletin. When our duplicator operator cuts the stencil, he floats on pink clouds to the asteroid belt, or starts chasing green men all over dear old Barsoom

Our club is not "fanmish" so we don't try to dictate to the editors the type of stories they should publish. We leave that to the chronic letter writers who have set themselves up as a self-appointed board of censors.—*4116 Charlotte, Kansas City, 10, Mo.*

You're welcome, George. As for the "self-appointed board of censors," we'd like to know what other non-writers of letters have to say. Are there those among our readers who resent the fans dominating our column? Are there those who feel the

published letters reflect not so much attempts at honest criticism as the desire to see one's name in print? If the silent audience has opinions on this subject (and we have a strong hunch they do), it's time for them to step from the shadows and speak up. Even a chronic non-writer can break the habit pattern. Just once, huh? We'll be looking forward to a mail-sack bulging with letters from heretofore unheard-from readers.

More From Our Mail

Thomas E. Mitchel comments on Fantastic Story Magazine (favorably) and says he rates Murray Leinster tops in the field. Ron Anger, also commenting upon Winter Fantastic Stories, says it was a "nostalgic treat" to read two stories from the first issue of the Thrilling Group—*The World Thinkers* by Jack Vance, and *Things Pass By* by Murray Leinster. Victor Paananen says, "Startling's covers get better all the time! If Thrilling Publications wanted to clean up, they'd offer their readers suitable-for-framing reprints of the April and November covers."

A. B. Lucas asks a question concerning a Murray Leinster story—and we've queried Leinster on it. No answer as yet. Garry Bennet enjoyed the Winter Startling, especially *The Snows of Ganymede*. Jack R. Tate comments on female fans; not too favorably. Ellen Kaplan writes on pretty

[*Turn page*]

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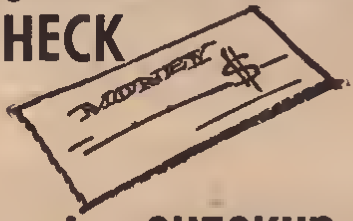

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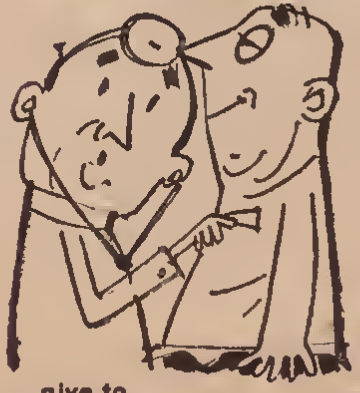

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blue paper, but her pen drips acid. Frank Arthur Kerr gives a complete history of Thrilling Wonder and Fantastic Stories—in memorium. Del Palmer screams, "Why the hell did you cut off the Manning Draco series?" Our answer—we didn't cut it off; it just withered away and died.

Bill Steen, Kennard Nebraska, would like to hear from any Iowa or Nebraska fan clubs. James Broschart says that unless fans criticize stories, editors and writers wouldn't know what's good and bad. W. C. Brandt (in two letters) says "keep up the good work" and ends with his trade-mark, Happy Blast-offs. Mark Wellington writes a solid two pages of argument in favor of science against religion, but also states that some of science's proponents are messing up the battle. He is tired of the whole discussion, and so are we! Anthony Zampetti liked *Name Your Pleasure* and *The Counterfeiter* in the winter TWS.

Richard Horter, a boot-camp Marine, wants a "—well-paced adventure story stocked with creative ideas. The writing must be clear, lucid and understandahle. It must give a sense of reality." Ye olde editorial board heartily concurs, so just watch our future issues. Ron Goodman goes on about religion, con, Martin H. Potter says, "Mmmmm, boy! I wish you printed covers without any lettering on them so I could frame them. Schomburg did a real nice job on the Winter, Fantastic Stories!"

Wanted—Cantroversies!

Pat Scott is annoyed that there isn't enough controversial material in the letter column. (Bad eyes, maybe?) Richard G. Brunner doesn't like religion. James W. Ayers liked the Winter TWS, and handed out laurels to Gunn's *Name Your Pleasure.* Jan Sadler felt quite differently—cussed us out for the same mag. Lilleeth Heisey defends religion vigorously and intelligently, and says, "Theology has its place, but not in the reader's columns of any magazines except those *devoted* to religion." Gary Labowitz spends three pages stating he will stay out of arguments—and ends up trying to start a new one on Buddhists vs Christians. (At least that's the way it looked to us.) Les Zeller advises Thrilling Publications to stop dropping science fiction mags and drop western, detective and love-story mags instead. This editor is all for it, but you should hear what our western, detective and love-story editors have to say!

William J. Mallory sends us a copy of his "Logic Mirror—a short study of probability and how to count without numbers." Thanks—we've used fingers and toes for quite some time now. Cathy Harlan says she's beginning to like "that Ron Ellis of yours." Ours? That's not a nice thing to say, Cathy! Ken Tickle doesn't feel religion has done much in the several thousand years it's had on-stage. W. R. Kaufman drops us a card—likes our mag and letter column. (Two more letters by Vic Paananen—prolific, ain't he?) James Lewis sends us a replica of a tombstone in memory of Thrilling Wonder Stories, with the enscription, "Pass the Xeno, Sarge." Like we told you, it's not dead yet, boys. Just wait and see.

Fan Fare

Allen Glasser, 71 Tehama Street, Brooklyn 18, New York, says, "I'd like to join or form a group of mature science-fantasy readers in Brooklyn. Only object: to discuss provocative ideas presented in this literary field. Would anyone similarly interested please contact me?"

Vol. 5, No. 1, of the Fanvet, published by the Fantasy Veterans Association, informs us that Frank R. Prieto, Jr. has been elected Commander and James V. Taurasi, Sr. elected Secretary. Congrats.

Daniel McPhail, president of the Oklahoma Science Fiction Confederation, extends a cordial invitation to the staff and readers of our publications to attend the Okie's third annual science fiction convention. It will be called the Oklacon-3, and will be held July 3rd and 4th, 1955, at the Western Village Hotel, Tulsa, Oklahoma. One dollar will bring a membership card, all progress bulletins, and entitle the card bearer to attend all sessions. To join, or for information, address the convention chairman, Mrs. Dolores Chappell, 5921 East 4th Place, Tulsa.

Larry B. Farsace writes that his new magazine, Golden Atom, will be late due to circumstances beyond his control. Good luck, Larry.

That's the works for now.

—THE EDITOR.

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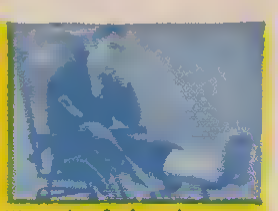

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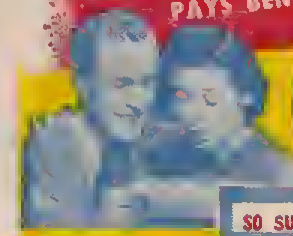

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